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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1 ]**

**MEH:** [IDENTIFICATION] Joe, how did you come to be at Black Mountain  
College?

**JF:** How did I come to be at Black Mountain College. Well, let's see, I heard  
about it from somebody who had been at the summer work camp — that  
was before they had the institutes. I think they were building the Studies  
Building then. Then I also heard about it, read about it, in Louis Adamic's  
book, or article. Can't remember: I think it was out of the book, but it had  
originally been a magazine article. So, I knew about it while I was still in  
high school and decided well, after-- Well, then after I got out of high  
school, I was drafted. But I still had to, you know, after I got out –  
Fortunately Black Mountain was on the GI Bill, which was, you know, hard  
to believe but it was. So, I was accepted for the summer session in 1946,  
and I guess kind of had to reapply for the regular year, you know. I was  
admitted anyway.

**MEH:** So you finished high school, and then you went immediately into the  
service?

**JF:** Pretty soon afterwards.

**MEH:** And when you went to Black Mountain, what branch of the service were you in?

**JF:** Army. And I was overseas for a while, and at the end of the War pretty much. But I was in the service for 32 months, almost three years. Well, that was a big enrollment push from people at Black Mountain because of the GI Bill. They had to get all those — what do you call them? — barracks buildings, surplus, war surplus barracks buildings to house all the students.

**MEH:** Do you remember the first time you went to the college? Do you remember physically how you traveled there?

**JF:** Yes. By train, in a Pullman. Yes. And —

**MEH:** From Cincinnati?

**JF:** No, it was from Cleveland.

**MEH:** Cleveland.

**JF:** There were some other people on the same train. I can't remember exactly who: I think Willie Joseph may have been one of them. But I knew that these people were going to Black Mountain, just sort of — (LAUGHS) without knowing them, you know.

**MEH:** How could you tell?

**JF:** Well, I don't know. Just some seventh sense, you know.

**MEH:** Had you ever been in the South before?

**JF:** Well, yes, I had been in the army. My basic training was in Georgia. But that was different. It was a different part of the South, certainly. Much more scenic — I mean, I guess parts of Georgia are nice too, but it was very kind of overwhelming.

**MEH:** What was overwhelming?

**JF:** The setting of the place.

**MEH:** Of Black Mountain?

**JF:** Yes, Black Mountain.

**MEH:** Do you remember what in the Adamic article attracted you, what appealed to you?

**JF:** Well, partly there was, you know, the emphasis on art, the arts. And just the way the college was set up. Not — I don't know anything about — there were no board of trustees, but just the whole idea of no grades and requirements and so on, you know, it was a different kind of thing. That appealed to me.

**MEH:** You were from a family with an art background.

**JF:** Well, on my mother's side, my grandfather was a painter, an architectural painter, you might say. He decorated churches, which involved a lot of kind of fool-the-eye things: figures way up high. They were supposed to appear in a certain way. It wasn't just eye level anything. So, he had done that in Italy and then he lived with us for a while, and he did some in the United States too, particularly. There was one that still exists in Hartford, Connecticut. There may be more than one.

**MEH:** What was his name?

**JF:** Angelo Cominelli. And then on my father's side, that was the musical side. My father and two or three of his brothers played — They had a little orchestra of their own, called The Fiore Brothers. You know, they played popular music of the time.

**MEH:** Was this in Cleveland?

**JF:** Yes. That may have started somewhere else, I don't know, but I think it was Cleveland.

**MEH:** Were your family on either side recent immigrants?

**JF:** Well, yes. Let's see. My dad came over in '92 when he was five years old. My mother came later. She was sort of my grandfather, her father's, manager and model and (LAUGHS), did all kinds of things for him. I don't remember exactly when she came. She still kept up — and, of course, with my grandfather — speaking Italian. My father's family, they wanted to make sure that children would learn English, the language of the country, but that had its disadvantage too because they sort of lost the speaking.

**MEH:** Did you grow up bilingual?

**JF:** No. Not really, because, well, as they say, I had two older sisters and there was just my mother and her father spoke together, because he didn't speak much English at all.

**MEH:** So you arrived at Black Mountain by train. Do you remember your first impression of the college?

**JF:** Yes, I sort of remember the dining hall. (LAUGHS) Well, the students who had already been there and all, you know, kind of knew each other. They tended to sit together, you know, at the tables in different groups sort of, and there certainly was a faculty group like that. I don't remember exactly myself, but I know Mary said when she went down there — when she became a student there — and her first day, going into the dining hall and sitting at I think it was the Albers' table or something, not knowing anything about it, and she was quietly reminded that (LAUGHS, UNINTELL).

**MEH:** That was the summer of '46.

**JF:** Yes. For me, not for Mary.

**MEH:** So, that was the summer Varda was there and Jacob Lawrence?

**JF:** Yes.

**MEH:** Did you study with them?

**JF:** Yes.

**MEH:** How do you remember Varda?

**JF:** (LAUGHS). He was certainly a character — colorful. Colorful. Interesting speaker, I mean teacher, — Well, he had all kinds of anecdotes, you know, about — Certain kinds of jokes and — Sort of flamboyant, you know, in his dress. He set sort of a trend of all these tie-dyed shirts and bare feet and (LAUGHS). But his ideas about painting were — really came out of Cubism, but he did have his sense of transparency in his work. He was always harping on transparency, you know, and color, and so on.

**MEH:** Did he actually teach a class?

**JF:** Yes. Albers had a class. I don't know if they did Color and Design both that summer. He did Design. I took that.

**MEH:** Did you take the class?

**JF:** Yes, I took that, and Varda — And Jacob Lawrence.

**MEH:** What do you remember about Jacob Lawrence?

**JF:** Well, he was a terribly sweet guy. Well, of course, he was involved in a certain kind of social position, you know, and that came out in his teaching somewhat but not overly. I mean he was interested in abstraction certainly. Well, I don't know. It was very easygoing kind of classes, I remember, you know. But he's a marvelous painter. Terrific.

**MEH:** You say he was involved in a certain social position. You're referring to his subject matter?

**JF:** Yes, I think so. But he wasn't, he was certainly not preaching, you know. He was involved in making art, too, you know. Well, you know, summer sessions are so busy and high-pitched. There are so many things going on. You can't digest it all.

**MEH:** Right. Did you take any of the sculpture classes that summer?

**JF:** A little bit. What was his name — Leo — ?

**MEH:** Leo Amino?

**JF:** Leo Amino, yes. But I don't think I did much with that somehow.

**MEH:** What about Concetta Scaravaglione?

**JF:** No, I didn't work with her at all. I can't even remember all the people that were there that summer.

**MEH:** What was Albers' class like?

**JF:** Well, he would assign certain kind of study, you know. He'd use a *matière* study, a symmetry study, I don't know, and people would bring in the things and put them on the floor and go around them and point at them.  
(LAUGHS)

**MEH:** How did you react to this? Did you find this useful as somebody studying art?

**JF:** Yes, I found it useful. I think that some of the students got so wrapped up in these studies things that they didn't want to go any farther than that, you know. They became so — especially some of the people who had been there and had studied under Albers for maybe a couple of years already. But it was valuable. Really valuable. I sort of had — I backed off at a certain point. Well, actually I didn't really study with Albers after that because he went away to Mexico on sabbatical, and that's when Bolotowsky came down.

**MEH:** [IRRELEVANT REMARKS ABOUT EXTERNAL NOISES NOT TRANSCRIBED] Do you remember a Greek party that summer? A costume party?

**JF:** Oh yes, oh yeah, the Greek mythology. Yes, right.

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

**JF:** (LAUGHS) Well, there were a lot of wild costumes. I don't remember specifically, you know, now — I remember the one I had because it was so cumbersome.

**MEH:** What was it?

**JF:** Cerberus, the three-headed dog. This big sort of cardboard construction. Yes, that was a memorable event, I guess. See people later on, oh, like in New York, running into Jacob Lawrence and his wife Gwen. They said something, "Remember that Greek party!" (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** Had you studied art before you came to Black Mountain?

**JF:** Yes, to a certain extent. I'd had a class briefly in printmaking in Cleveland, and learned some of the etching processes and so on. (VOICE FALLS — INAUDIBLE). But that was just brief. I had studied at Cleveland Museum through the special class there, I think, given by a man named Milton Fox (PH) who later became I think the editor of Harry Abrams books. Well, that was supposed to be sort of an advanced — There were other classes at the museum. It was Saturday morning, you know, for school kids, and that was supposed to be the advanced one. We got three hours of cubism and that sort of thing (LAUGHS).

**MEH:** So, after that first summer Albers left and went on sabbatical.

**JF:** Yes.

**MEH:** And Bolotowsky came.

**JF:** Yes.

**MEH:** What was Bolotowsky like as a teacher?

**JF:** Well, he was certainly not a pedagogical type, you know. I mean Albers was really a pedagogue of the first water. I suppose it was much looser in a way, and kind of the content was different, say. Bolotowsky taught me a



certain way. As he painted, his development was started probably with Cubism and, you know, Constructivism and so on, and eventually got to the neo-, to the Mondrian kind of –

**MEH:** [INSTRUCTION ABOUT SPEAKING LOUDER]. So you were saying that — Why don't you tell me again. You talked about Bolotowsky's teaching methods.

**JF:** Bolotowsky taught sort of in the same sense of his own development in painting, probably was from Cubism into Constructivism into the Mondrian neo-plastic idea. It seemed like everybody was doing a kind of Cubism, you know. (LAUGHS) And somewhat into the neo-plastic, too. Some of the people did. Hank Bergman, who was my roommate — Hank and John Bergman, you know, they were both sort of involved in that (INAUDIBLE WORD), the geometric abstraction part. Bolotowsky's (UNINTELL WORD).

**MEH:** Where was Bolotowsky's study located? Where did he hold his classes?

**JF:** Oh, down in the basement of the Studies Building. That was the classroom for art classes.

**MEH:** Did you primarily work in his class, or did you work at home and bring stuff in for critiques?

**JF:** Well, no, we had still life and sometimes a model. At that point it was a clothed model. Yeah. That was mostly what we worked from. I can't remember now.

**MEH:** Do you remember what media you used?

**JF:** Mostly, I used the oil on paper cardboard and so on. I have a lot of those things. Well, some of them that were in the retrospective, yeah. I gave most of them, the small ones, the paper ones to the Black Mountain Museum. But I still have a lot of ones, which is — I don't know how — Yes I do know how those things survived the '53 fire.

**MEH:** How did they survive?

**JF:** Well, because I had some things shown in Cleveland at a gallery called the Ten-Thirty Gallery, which was the gallery in Cleveland at the time. So I would bring things home and take them over there, and they had a whole boxful of things in their inventory. And all that time. So, finally when that gallery closed, sometime maybe around 1950, I can't remember exactly when, I guess I went and collected my things and left them at my parents' house. So, at a certain point I got them back, but it was after the fire.

(LAUGHS)

**MEH:** So, you never really painted at Black Mountain in a geometric abstraction fashion. Your work was always — maybe Constructivist, but really painterly.

**JF:** No, actually some of the stuff that did get burned up in the fire was geometric, because I remember doing a lot of studies. I think actually in 1948, even though I did — I don't think I worked with Albers then, you know, when he came back. But I think I did quite a few things that would be more related to Albers than to Bolotowsky, but they disappeared.

**MEH:** Were you aware of Bolotowsky's work? Did he let people come to his studio?

**JF:** Oh, yeah.

**MEH:** So you knew what he was doing?

**JF:** Oh, yeah, sure.

**MEH:** Who were other students who were serious then about art work?

**JF:** Hmm. Trying to remember — Well, Noland was one. I think the Bergmans were probably. I don't know what — Of course, Hank became an architect. John I don't know what he got into. Ruth Asawa certainly. I just can't think of all the people. Gregory Masurovsky was one. You name some yourself. You'd probably get the people from that time.

**MEH:** Did you take a general range of classes?

**JF:** Yes, I did, but I think that I didn't do very well in most of them. There was a Shakespeare class with M.C. Richards. I can't remember what he called it, a class with John Wallen. But I'm afraid I didn't do very well in those things. I was taken to task by my advisor.

**MEH:** Who was that?

**JF:** I think it was Ted Dreier. For not, you know, spreading out more.

**MEH:** But you could really get away with just focusing on art?

**JF:** Yes, I think they gave up on me after a while, for other things. Well, I was involved in music, too. I guess that's not — According to some lights, that's not sufficient breadth.

**MEH:** Who was teaching music then?

**JF:** Well, there was Edward Lowinsky and Charlotte Schlesinger, known as Bimbus. I studied with her — piano, that is. Lowinsky was sort of more like the Albers of the music side, because he was a very severe teacher and, you know — But he was a real scholar of, you know, especially early music. He sometimes played too for — played piano for the students, informally, and he would play Beethoven and even Chopin, which was (LAUGHS) seemed like an odd thing for a Medieval, Renaissance scholar.

**MEH:** Did you take any classes with him?

**JF:** I don't think so. I took chorus, but that was with Bimbus. I can't remember.

**MEH:** What was she like?

**JF:** Bimbus? Oh she was a very intense, intense person, and when she played it was like, I don't know, somebody absolutely immersed in the music, you know. She was sort of the specialist in Mozart, I'd say. That's why she got — her nickname was supposedly Mozart's dog.

**MEH:** I never knew where that came from.

**JF:** I think that's it.

**MEH:** She had problems with her sight.

**JF:** Yes. She had very big lenses, you know, thick lenses for her glasses. Partly — Maybe that was because of her sight that she, when she played, she sort of leaned into the, you know, piano, kind of looked up at the music like this sometimes. Yeah. But she was very generous to put up with me as a piano student, since I wasn't a serious musi — You know, I was serious, I was a serious amateur, but, you know, that wasn't going to be

my field. But I enjoyed it greatly. We did Bach and Mozart and a little Schubert. That was about it.

**MEH:** Did you go to her cottage?

**JF:** Well, let's see, she had the last — the apartment, downstairs apartment, in the Studies Building, and that's where she had her classes. She had a grand piano in there. That's what I remember.

**MEH:** Where was your study?

**JF:** My study was — I think it was downstairs. And — downstairs, going to the rear was on the left, toward the back. I can't remember exactly. But I know that it wasn't accessible when we went in '95 to visit the Studies Building because they had changed, you know, the arrangement somewhat in there.

**MEH:** Did you have any classes with Max Dehn?

**JF:** No, I didn't.

**MEH:** Do you have any particular memories of him?

**JF:** I remember mostly his wildflower tours, which I didn't go on. But I mean he was infamous for that, going up in the woods, you know, and finding all these rare plants. That's what I remember mostly about him. Well, you know, I think he played the cello. Do you know?

**MEH:** I don't remember.

**JF:** I have some vague memory that he played the cello, too. Of course mathematics, you know, and music goes together, a lot of them.

**MEH:** Were you there when Julie Scheir was directing the chorus?

**JF:** Julie Scheir was directing the chorus?

**MEH:** He was a black student, and he did an a capella chorus.

**JF:** Julie Scheir? You've got him mixed up with somebody else, don't you?

No?

**MEH:** Oh. Yes. Louis Selders.

**JF:** No, I think he must have been before –

**MEH:** I think he was maybe when you were in California.

**JF:** I don't think so. I don't remember hearing that name at all.

**MEH:** Not Julie Scheir. Louis Selders is who I'm thinking of. A black student?

That name, Julie Scheir, was entirely different.

**JF:** He was — Well anyway, I don't remember. I remember the name but I don't associate anything with him.

**MEH:** What did you do on the work program?

**JF:** I got to remember. (LAUGHS) Well, I suppose I went on the trash runs, like everybody else, at a certain point. I don't remember other things.

**MEH:** Did you work on the farm?

**JF:** No, I didn't work on the farm? Did I work on the farm? I remember at one point helping the neighbors hay, getting in their hay, somebody down the road. Whether that was a part of the work program, I don't know. That must have been towards the end of — I don't know. Maybe it was the middle of the summer. It was summer. But I think maybe I did it the next year too, something like that. I'm blanking out on a lot of things.

**MEH:** You were there in the summer of '46, and then you were there for the academic year '46- '47. Did you stay for that next summer?

**JF:** Yes, I was there for — Let's see. Summer '46, Summer '47. '47 was a music institute, then the infamous '48, and equally infamous '49 (LAUGHS), because I had come back from California then. And then '50 and '51. Then '52 was the only summer session that I missed, in all the time. In all the Black Mountain time. So —

**MEH:** Do you have any particular memories of mountain hikes?

**JF:** Yes. Probably didn't do it that much, but I remember going up the, was it the pasture, the upper pasture, or whatever it was called, and — Somewhere from there you get into one of those pockets of old settlers or something, that were kind of — Did they still speak strange English? Something. Anyway, people that had been in that — Families that had been in that area, in certain little pockets, for centuries maybe. I remember something about a waterfall. I went there. But at that time, of course, I wasn't involved in, you know, doing anything with the landscape. It's ironic, isn't it? There was all that great scenery all over the place.

**MEH:** You did that one small study, at the Studies Building, but it was still very abstract.

**JF:** Yeah, right. Yeah, I did a couple of things that were, you know, sketchy, rather landscapey but — It was really the last few months in 1956 that I was there that I was doing watercolors. It was like I attempted to record —

I wasn't doing photography then, but, you know, to record some of the things there. Some of the views.

**MEH:** Actually, very few people painted the landscape, as such. Why do you think that was the case?

**JF:** Well, I think it had a lot to do with their teachers, too. One student who did was Grey Stone. I remember that. He was sort of like a figurative painter, and he did paint some figures and so on, and landscapes. And he was pretty brave to do that, surrounded by all the, at that point, kind of action painting, you know. I wonder what happened to him. I lost track of him. Do you know?

**MEH:** I'm trying through the internet to find the name. Why did you leave to go to California?

**JF:** I don't know. I think it was — It was, it was a very controversial time at Black Mountain, it seemed to me. That summer was so — well, there was a lot of antagonism, I think, in, you know, certain, in certain groups, certain people. It just seemed like a healthier thing to do, to get a change of scene. But —

**MEH:** Could you stay — ? I'm sorry. Go ahead.

**JF:** Could have as easily gone to New York, probably, but I wasn't ready for that. I don't know exactly.

**MEH:** What do you remember about the summer of '48?

**JF:** The summer of '48. Well, that was the de Kooning, John Cage, Bucky Fuller — the first year, Bucky Fuller. God, who all was there? Was that the



Satie Festival, and the music department reaction to the Satie Festival.

Let's see –

**MEH:** How did that play out? The conflict between the music department and the, you know, Bodky and Cage?

**JF:** How did it play out?

**MEH:** Was it a really open conflict?

**JF:** Oh, yeah! You know, it was — Well — Cage produced the Satie Festival, and he performed just most all of the works of Satie. He set up Beethoven as kind of the *bête noire*, you know. This sort of set the Bodky and classical German side of it, set them on edge, and they sort of played into Cage — I'm sure that was deliberate on his part, to kind of present it that way. I don't know how it played out. I think one of the things about it was that Cage was invited not by the music department but by Albers, you know.

**MEH:** That's interesting.

**JF:** There was a certain amount of resentment there, you know. It's like they felt it was their domain, and I can understand that too. But actually Cage and Merce Cunningham had visited earlier than the summer session. As I remember it. That's when he played some of — I don't know if he played them all, the *Sonatas and Interludes*. He played some music for Merce too, and short, fairly short performance. I remember. But that was all — something very new for everybody there, you know.

**MEH:** Had you heard a prepared piano? Heard of a prepared piano?

**JF:** I guess I had heard of it, but, you know, it was — I had heard Cage's name, but I certainly hadn't heard Cunningham's. Yeah. So I don't remember actually. But that wasn't — But Cage and Cunningham came back of course in '52, wasn't it? That's the year that I wasn't there. For something. Well, that's when, yeah, Merce formed his company.

**MEH:** That was actually '53.

**JF:** '53. Yes. Okay.

**MEH:** Did de Kooning teach classes?

**JF:** Yeah. After a manner of speaking, he did, yeah (LAUGHS). I think it was more kind of, you know, critiques. He would lecture sometimes, and he was a little difficult to follow because he had a lot of ideas, there again, that were new to the people there. Whole notions of space and different things that were quite new and different from whatever, out of Cubism or out of whatever, you know. Although de Kooning was certainly — had background in that, too, you know. Early Twentieth-century Modernism of various sorts.

**MEH:** Can you remember what you thought about his painting at that time?

**JF:** I didn't quite, I didn't quite get it, you know. It was difficult for me, until — I sort of had delayed response to it, you know. Maybe a couple of years before I really got into it more and also into Gorky. Gorky — Of course, Gorky had just died at the beginning, or just before the summer session of '48. But I hadn't known his work until after, until after de Kooning, I mean after I'd studied with de Kooning.

**MEH:** Do you remember whether he talked about Gorky that summer?

**JF:** Yeah, he did. Elaine de Kooning wrote a nice article. Maybe you've read it, maybe you saw it, sort of remembering that summer. How they were so poor, and Gorky had committed suicide, and it was kind of hectic for them.

**MEH:** So, you left and you went to California. Oh, one other question before we go to California. You talked about the conflict in the community. Was it possible to be in the community and stay apart from the conflict?

**JF:** Yes, I think so. I mean maybe I managed to do that somewhat, but – Well, I don't know — That San Francisco experience, I don't know how beneficial that was.

**MEH:** How did you get there? You were married at that time?

**JF:** Yes. Well, actually Anne and I got married not too long before leaving for California.

**MEH:** Where were you married? Were you married in Black Mountain?

**JF:** Yes. In Asheville, actually. Now, let's see. We got a ride. Jerrold Levy, Fanny Hobart and Charles was – they had gotten married during the year. Charles Dreyfus? Fanny Hobart. [MEH: On the trip to the West Coast, the car occupants were Joe and Anne Fiore, Herbert Bayer, Ruth Asawa and Robert Lovelace who was driving.] Yeah, I think there were five of us drove out there. I didn't do any of the driving. I hadn't driven.

**MEH:** You hadn't learned to drive?

**JF:** No, I hadn't learned to drive yet. I didn't get my driver's license until 1950. Anyway. And that was — Well, I remember stopping on the way in

Colorado, in Aspen. Jerrold Levy's mother was there and stepfather – what's his name, Herbert Bayer, wasn't that his stepfather? I remember that. That was before Aspen became a big deal. Festival thing. Site. So I don't know, living in California, moving a few times, it was hectic and Anne became ill, and we came back to North Carolina.

**MEH:** You were there for a year. Were you painting then? Were you working?

**JF:** Oh, yeah.

**MEH:** You had the GI Bill. Were you going to school?

**JF:** Yes. In San Francisco, you mean. Yeah, well that was just like a big atelier, you know. I mean even Black Mountain was more structured than that, you know. (LAUGHS). There were a lot of GI people who were well beyond student age, you know. Quite a few.

**MEH:** Where did you take classes?

**JF:** At the – what was then the California School of Fine Arts. Now it's called San Francisco Art Institute. Same place. I still get alumni news from them, but I'm not very much of an alumnus.

**MEH:** When you were there, now is that when you painted the Tin Angel?

**JF:** Um-hm (AFFIRMATIVE).

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

**JF:** Well, Peggy Vaughan bought this place in Sausalito, and wanted to make it into a bar or restaurant or whatever it was, you know. I can't remember. Sort of bar-restaurant, I guess, café, whatever. She hired Varda for decor, and Varda subcontracted Dan Rice and myself to do these hex — painted

sort of simulated stained-glass hexes on the windows. And that's what I remember about it.

**MEH:** Varda did the decor?

**JF:** Yeah, well, I don't know. I don't know exactly what he did, come to think of it.

**MEH:** What do you mean by "hexes"?

**JF:** You know what the Pennsylvania Dutch have, these designs, hexagonal designs? It's called — To keep the witches out and something, right? Well, that's more or less the idea of it, right? But they were on the windows.

**MEH:** Do you have any photographs of that?

**JF:** No, I wasn't — No, and nobody else that I know of — Well, somebody must have, you know. I don't know, is Peggy Vaughan still around? Or she's gone.

**MEH:** Quite a few years ago.

**JF:** Oh, quite a few years ago. Well, do you know what happened to the Tin Angel? Is it still going?

**MEH:** No. I don't know physically what's there. I think she changed and went through several different bars. What other Black Mountain people were in San Francisco then, do you remember? Were the Dreyfuses there for that, did they stay there for that year?

**JF:** I believe so, yes. I don't know. Then lost track of them. No, that was, in retrospect it probably wasn't a good move to go out there, although I did — Well, I can't assess the work that I did out there because some of it

somehow just left there, and some of it that I brought back was also, went up in flames, in the fire of '53. Just about everything that I brought back, you know, was in that fire. It's even hard for me to remember what — There's one painting from San Francisco that — Glenn Lewis bought two paintings, or maybe three. I think it was two. And he was married for a while to a woman, Kay Donithorne, and she got one of the paintings. She's up in Maine. We knew her there. I mean after we got to Maine. I think I have a slide of that — of that painting.

**MEH:** Is she still there?

**JF:** Yes. I don't know what Glenn is doing, or where he is. But it seems to me we heard from him not all that long ago, but can't remember now. Anyway — I know one thing, some of the paintings that I did there were some of the biggest paintings I had done up to that point. I would be sort of curious to see them now. But I am so careless about leaving things, you know. There was this show that Varda arranged for me. It was in kind of a restaurant gallery in Oakland, and that was sort of up, I think it was still up when we left or something, and I didn't do anything about those paintings, you know, having them sent or whatever. I don't know what, you know — It was probably because of our situation, you know — with Anne having that problem, you know, and then just trying to get out of there, and I just didn't think any more about it, but, anyway —

**MEH:** Was there any medical help for Anne at that point? Or were you all just toughing it out?

**JF:** Well, it just really kind of occurred right at the end, you know, it was pretty much at the end of the summer, or the term, anyway. And so — How did we get back? That was — Again, I think — was it Dan? Dan and June brought us, and — I can't remember now. It might have been. So.

**MEH:** This was the summer of '49 that you came back?

**JF:** Yes.

**MEH:** Had you been asked to teach at that point?

**JF:** No. No. That happened after the summer session. Well, of course, Albers and Dreier and some of the music people had left, you know, already, and the Board of Fellows was, they called in Pittinger — was that his name? yeah — to sort of reorganize the whole thing. That's when they hired a lot of people, new people, including the young ex-students of, you know, Jennerjahns and Hazel and myself.

**[END OF FIRST TAPE. BEGINNING OF SECOND TAPE]**

**MEH:** [INSTRUCTIONS AND COMMENTS ABOUT VOICE LEVEL AND EQUIPMENT NOT TRANSCRIBED]. You came back in the summer of '49 from California, and Albers and the Dreiers and Bodky and Schles — the whole group had left.

**JF:** Yes.

**MEH:** So how did your teaching appointment come about?

**JF:** It's a good question (LAUGHS). Actually, as I remember it, it was Paul Williams who asked me if I would like to teach that fall. Maybe he mentioned something about, you know, the Jennerjahns and Hazel, too.

Like a fool, I said yes (LAUGHS). Then we decided that, you know, after we were officially asked and so on, that Pete would do the Albers courses, kind of continue because he had been an assistant to Albers — the Color and Design — and I would do painting and drawing. And that's the way that came about.

**MEH:** So, it was sort of like an Albers-Bolotowsky division.

**JF:** Right! (LAUGHS) Yes, right.

**MEH:** Had you ever taught before?

**JF:** No.

**MEH:** How did you set up your classes?

**JF:** I guess pretty much the same way that Ilya had, you know. Well, the drawing we had models mostly. There were some students who posed. The one that's in your book, that photo, the model is Tim LaFarge.

**MEH:** Somebody else just told me he was the model on this trip. I don't know who it was. I'll have to check and see. That's funny. Some people have said Nick Cernovich; you're saying Tim LaFarge.

**JF:** I'm pretty sure it's Tim, yes.

**MEH:** When I'm listening to the tapes, I'll let you know who the third contender is.

**JF:** Oh, okay (LAUGHTER). The third contender! There are three?

**MEH:** Yes, somebody else is claiming to be the model. I can't remember. It was somebody on the trip in California. Could it be Glenn Lewis?

**JF:** I don't remember Glenn doing that. No.

**MEH:** When I listen to the tapes, I'll be able (OVERTALK)



**JF:** Well, we did some, you know, with — Later on we just sort of had — different students would sit for a bit and rotate, kind of. Because I know I have some drawings myself, of Tom Field and of George Fick and I think maybe one of Grey Stone. I'm not sure. And then there were some others too. Painting was more like critiques. We didn't have — Well, maybe we did some set-up still-lives or something in the first year. I don't quite remember now.

**MEH:** What was it like to be on the faculty after having been a student?

**JF:** (LAUGHS). I don't know. At that point, it seemed not too unharmonious, but it did get so later on, you know.

**MEH:** Pittinger was there then.

**JF:** Yeeeaah, at the beginning, but I don't remember his staying on for very long. He was sort of like — I don't know. The Board somehow, what's the word I want? – transferred their authority or something to him, to hire people? Is that — I'm not sure about that, but it seemed that way. And I can't even remember what his particular field was. Do you know?

**MEH:** I think administration.

**JF:** Just administration.

**MEH:** What was he like? I have no image of him whatsoever.

**JF:** An elderly gentleman. Didn't seem to me to be the kind of person that would be either pleased to be at Black Mountain or that would please other people that he was there (LAUGHS). He just didn't seem to be, you know, appropriate for the place. That was just, you know, an impression.

And I think some of the people that he hired were, had that quality too, you know. That image. Well, they didn't last very long. Most of them — A lot of them left at the end of that year. I think it was, that was probably as close to becoming a kind of liberal arts, ordinary liberal arts school, as Black Mountain ever got. I mean it probably could have gone over into that direction, getting a board of directors and so on. It would have certainly prolonged the life of the college, but would it have been the same college? In that particular time, I think not.

**MEH:** What were the conflicts? When things did get rough, what were the issues at that point?

**JF:** Well, I think that pretty much the feeling that I was just speaking of, you know. The senses of the people that were there, the conflicts. I mean that board, the Board of Fellows, probably would have liked maybe to have a more secure kind of existence for the college and so on, you know. And more kind of order, more — Order, there are different kinds of orders. Pretty much the kind of place maybe that some of those people came from, you know. So, I think it was like the conflict maybe could be summed up as kind of the intuitive side and the regulated side, you know. That would be to me the main conflict.

**MEH:** Who would have been on which side? Where would Bill Levi have been in that?

**JF:** Well, I think Bill Levi would have been on the intuitive side, despite the fact that his scholarly training and demeanor and the content of his history of

philosophy and so on — But he seemed to fit in well with the way things were in, say, 1947. Maybe by 1950 it was different, I don't know.

**MEH:** Do you think the college had changed at that point? You were there in the post-War years, '48, do you think by 1950 it really had changed?

**JF:** Well, it certainly had changed in the sense that — Well, certainly it changed that Albers had left, particularly. Dreier, too, partly because of his, you know, connections with some money. Albers certainly was the — if any one person could be, you know, the drawing power of the college for many years. But, yeah — The — Oh, yeah, I forgot. Olson coming in was a different, you know, that was a new move, too. That sort of turned things more onto the literary side, you know, the writing, poetry, whatnot. But he was certainly at least as dynamic personality as Albers. More so, I would say. Each in their own way, you know. But I think that opened up quite a lot of new things.

**MEH:** There was a conflict over you and Mary living together.

**JF:** Yeah.

**MEH:** What do you think was the real disagreement with the situation? I mean people had lived together before.

**JF:** Well, maybe, but not that (LAUGHS) — Not that openly or something, you know. There had been various — What do you mean people had been living together before?

**MEH:** Well —

**JF:** Elsewhere, you mean?

**MEH:** No, at Black Mountain. Even though – I'm trying to think. Maybe not faculty.

**JF:** Well, I don't know. I think the people on the board then wanted, they wanted, I'm not quite sure why, they wanted Bill Levi and M.C. out, and I was just sort of a thorn in the side somehow, I think mostly of Nell Rice because of background of her experience, you know. You know, it was just – it probably wasn't that important to most people but that was kind of like, well, you know, a person, young person like myself in that position to be better behaved.

**MEH:** You're saying that's what she thought about –

**JF:** Well, that's what — That's the sense I got of it. (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** Did you actually feel – did it go so far as — I can't remember. It did go so far as their asking for your resignation and M.C. and Bill.

**JF:** Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. Well then, let's see, I think that the board was, I don't know, were there eight people on the board, and there were four in favor and four against, like a standstill. But then they elected a ninth member of board, Paul Leser, and that shifted, I mean that demolished that attempt to get rid of three people. That's really what happened. No, I think, I mean I can't think of any previous incident of — There were some other incidents earlier on of probable homosexual incidents, but I don't remember any living together on the faculty. Oh, well, who was it? Somebody claimed that the Bolotowskys weren't really married. I don't know why. I can't remember who that was now. I think it was a student. Anyway.

**MEH:** I think that when they arrived at Black Mountain they weren't married. He was there and then she came down, and they were married in Asheville. I must say one thing I'm sorry that I said in my book, but I heard it from so many students, was that essentially Bill Levi had insisted that if he was on the faculty they should be married. I think that may be true. However I think that hurt her, and so I wish, you know — I wish I had been a little more sensitive to her feelings. But you were there for the summer of '50 when Paul Goodman was there?

**JF:** Yes.

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

**JF:** That whole conflict was brought on, I think, by Paul Goodman himself, you know. He was — well, I'm trying to think of the word I want. Well, he was a self-proclaimed homosexual and he was I think actively trying to convert some of the students. That's the impression I got. There were some very upset people, I think, that summer. Joel Oppenheimer, Fielding Dawson to a certain extent, I don't know.

**MEH:** You mean upset in terms of what their sexuality – ?

**JF:** Well, I know one thing, you know, when we had the ball games in the field down below around the Round House there, and, oh, Paul Goodman had to go pee and so he just peed right out in the open or something, or, you know, in plain view of whatever. And maybe somebody took him to task for that. But he made a big issue out of that, you know, that that was somehow, showed what prudes the people at Black Mountain were. I don't

know. He probably said he wasn't accepted for a permanent teaching position because — he would claim — because of his homosexuality. But I think it was other things than that. I think it was just like his abrasive quality that turned people off somehow.

**MEH:** Do you think irrespective of his sexuality he would really not have been a good community member? Given the same personality —

**JF:** It's hard to say. I don't know. Given the way things were that summer, yeah, I mean I don't — I don't think it would have been good for the college that much. But there again, I think it was like his own kind of action that, you know, booted him out kind of.

**MEH:** Did you organize that session? Did you invite Vicente and —

**JF:** Oh no, Vicente was much later. Yes, I did —

**MEH:** That's right. Stamos. Stamos.

**JF:** Stamos. No, I wasn't on the board then, at that time. That was, I don't know who — Yeah, let's see, 1950 was Stamos and —

**MEH:** Greenberg —

**JF:** Greenberg, and Paul Goodman.

**MEH:** Katy Litz may be been there. I'm not sure.

**JF:** Was she there or was she there the next year?

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

**JF:** I think she was there the next year. I'm not sure either. Yes, so — I don't know.

**MEH:** Were you familiar with Stamos's work? Do you remember — before you came?

**JF:** I don't think so. I don't think I was, no. Might have been. Maybe I was. Yeah, because that was 1950. I think I would have been. Or maybe not. I'm not sure, not sure. Oh, he's not still alive is he — Stamos? Or is he?

**MEH:** I don't think so.

**JF:** I don't think so either.

**MEH:** I could be wrong. Right. Yes, he is. I think he is.

**JF:** Oh he is?

**MEH:** Mm-hm, I think so.

**JF:** I should know, because Vincent Baldassano who's now the director of Silvermine —

**MEH:** Who?

**JF:** Oh he had that show up at Katonah. And I think maybe it was there. He did a show of Stamos. That long ago. I don't know where I got the idea that he wasn't — that possibly he wasn't alive now. He was a very good — He is, I should say, a very good painter. Not that well known now, somehow. He was better known probably in the '40s, early '40s. Yes, I always admired his work.

**MEH:** The next summer, when Motherwell was there and Shahn, did you invite them, or do you remember how it came about? The Board?

**JF:** That was still the Board. I don't know. I think Olson had something to do with inviting Shahn. They had known each other for, you know, in

Washington a period of time. And well, and Motherwell had been there the first — was it the first summer session?

**MEH:** It was '45.

**JF:** '45. Yeah, so he had been there before. And apparently there had been some incident, coincidence of the same combination in some other art summer session. I can't remember where. But there was some commenting by one or the other, I can't remember now, whether it was Shahn saying, "Oh Motherwell's always following me," or something like that.

**MEH:** They only overlapped briefly.

**JF:** Only a couple of days. I suppose they said hello, but I don't know. (LAUGHS) I remember Shahn's comment, something about Black Mountain was "a hotbed of antihumanism."

**MEH:** Is that referring to painting, do you think?

**JF:** Well, I don't know. And then some comment about — because Motherwell had mentioned Mozart as a paragon of something or the other. Shahn didn't like that. Why should he pick Mozart? What's that got to do with (LAUGHS). That was my sense of it.

**MEH:** Did you work at all with the Light, Sound, Movement workshop with Betty and Pete?

**JF:** Maybe a little bit. Not that much. I remember sort of making home-made drums, something, kind of home-made instruments. I don't think that I



stayed with it. I think Mary was involved with that for a while. But that was a nice thing they did, Betty and Pete.

**MEH:** What about drama, did you get involved in the drama productions at all?

**JF:** Not really, except the one that Mark Hedden did, the Kafka story.

**MEH:** What did you do with that, in that?

**JF:** Well, I don't remember. What was the name of that? I can't remember the name of the play. But I was the Old Man who rants and raves, standing up on his bed, and say the famous line: "Just because she lifts her skirts — the repulsive ninny!" (LAUGHS) That's all I remember of that!

**MEH:** What was Olson like? How would you describe him?

**JF:** Big. Big man, big ideas, big — you know — He was a very strong, powerful person. And extending ideas, expanding ideas and gathering in kind of — all kinds of sources, you know: ancient, modern, whatnot.

**MEH:** What about as a community member? What was he like?

**JF:** Oh, a community member? Well (LAUGHS) — If you mean — I don't think he worked on the kitchen dishwashing, or the garbage hauling or whatever, very much. So in that sense he was probably rated pretty low as a community member. But, anyway, he certainly had a big influence on a lot of people there. Yes, I think that — Well, let's see, he — Well he was the Prime Mover in the New Sciences of Man seminar thing, you know. He really did that whole thing, which was quite a revelation at the time. And, well, the Pottery Seminar. I don't know how much he had to do with that.

I'm not sure. That was probably the potters, but it might have been Olson too got that going.

**MEH:** Do you think he was really the dominant personality after his return?

**JF:** Yeah. Oh, yeah. Sure. Well, you know, he would have tried to keep the college going forever, if he could have. He didn't want to give it up at all. So — It probably took a lot out of him too, you know. But he had a bigger following after he left Black Mountain, I think, in Buffalo and everything, and he got to be, by the time he left Black Mountain, pretty well known too. Reputation.

**MEH:** Did you have a sense through the '50s that the college was going to close? Did you really see it pulling itself back up, or — ?

**JF:** I think for a while I did, yeah. After a while it didn't seem like — It had gotten numerically down to just a little nucleus of faculty and students. It just didn't seem like it was going to, you know — Things got worse and worse, in a certain way, so it just didn't, it didn't seem like it was going to make it. Because it wasn't just a matter of money, you know. It was, I think, energy. Energy that needed new blood. If it had gotten, say, maybe a certain amount of money and some fresh people that would, you know, continue kind of the education that had been traditional at Black Mountain, through different phases and different people,-. But, that might have been. But who can say? Who was it that said, I think after — maybe it was John Rice some years after he had left Black Mountain, saying to somebody: "Oh, is that place still going?" I don't know whether it was him or not.

Somebody who had been there early on and thought, well, it probably wouldn't last very long. No, it's still going, what a surprise, you know. So who can say, who can say. It was a unique place at a certain period of, you know, this country's history that — in a way it couldn't have gone, probably, the way it did. But it certainly set an example for some other institutions who adopted, you know, a lot of the kind of educational process that was exemplified at Black Mountain. But I don't know.

**MEH:** Tell me what you remember about the fire that burned the paintings.

**JF:** Oh, it wasn't just the paintings. The whole building. Everything.

**MEH:** What time of day did it occur?

**JF:** It was in the evening. It was a very unusually cold day. It was — That's the coldest day I ever remembered there at Black Mountain. Very cold. Well, for there, it was probably maybe like in the teens, or ten above, or something like that. It came on pretty suddenly, as I remember, and I went up — It was after supper, it seemed, in the dining hall and I went up to — I was going to take the car or get some antifreeze, get some antifreeze somehow, you know, freeze up, and I got up there and it seemed to me it smelled awfully smoky or something. I went inside, or maybe I went in the cellar where the furnace was, and then I could see it wasn't in flames but it was like embers or something, you know. And "Oh, my god," so I — I don't know whether I drove back down. Maybe I drove back down and sent an alarm or something. And, well, anyway, by the time everybody got up there, it was already starting to flame and by the time the fire department

came, it was, it was already, you know, really up in flames. So I don't know. Mrs. Jalowetz asked us to come, have some hot tea, at her house. But because of the fire, the electricity was off or something so she couldn't make hot tea with boiling water. She had to make it from the tap water, which was still warm, you know. That's what I remember about that. In the meantime, a lot of the students were up, and I guess after it had really burned down and they were, you know, pouring water or pumping wa – or whatever, to keep the fire down, and they didn't — They had a bottle of booze, but they didn't offer us any (LAUGHS).

**MEH:** Who was "they"?

**JF:** Well, they, the students. I don't know. I don't remember.

**MEH:** You probably needed it worse than anyone.

**JF:** Basil, Fee, I can't remember who was. I don't remember whether Dan Rice was there. Gee, I should remember who all – There weren't that many, you know. There weren't that many there, at that time.

**MEH:** Could you save anything from the fire?

**JF:** No. Not a thing.

**MEH:** Who shared the cottage?

**JF:** Wes and Bea Huss. They were upstairs. No. They were downstairs. We were upstairs. We took turns tending the furnace, and I guess — I don't know. Wes didn't fill the tank or something with water, because whatever happened it didn't — or there was a leak or something. I don't know. But years later he called us up in New York and Mary talked to him on the

phone. I guess I wasn't there. And she said, "He said 'Remember me? Wes Huss? I'm the guy that burned our house down.'" I don't know whether he was kidding or not. I don't know. But anyway — Well, see that was February '53, and we had been married in October '52, and we had all these wedding presents, you know, that burned up. But that was sort of, you know, a mixed curse/blessing, whatever you want to call it. We weren't too upset about that. I was more upset at the time about all the new materials that I'd bought — canvas and stretchers and the paint and whatnot, you know, recently. I guess I was more concerned about that than I was about the paintings. Now it wouldn't be quite — Now it's a different story, because I sort of try to remember what — I can't remember, you know, what — But there were certain other things that — like maybe personal, little personal things, that were missed. I had done some bookbinding of particular, you know, a few things, music scores, and I sort of missed those, you know. But that was something I knew I'd never do again. Anyway, that's what I remember about the fire. Oh, yes. The next day we came down to breakfast and everybody sort of looked at us kind of sheepish like, you know, we were going to be these — I don't know, we were sort of both kind of ebullient and — yeah. We'd say, "Oh well, it's, you know — it was just all that stuff." And people were shocked that we were so blasé about it. (LAUGHS) I think somebody, who — Elaine Urbain, when she heard about it — she wasn't there at the time — she

said, "Well that's not normal for people . ." you know. (LAUGHS) She had to tell us what's normal. Anyway.

**MEH:** Why did you decide to take a leave of absence in 1956?

**JF:** Well it wasn't — That was kind of a cover, in a way, because Olson was still, you know, planning to have a session, continue the college, and I thought that that was, it was just a gesture on my part, because I explained, I wrote a little thing about leave of absence, but I explained to the faculty that that was strictly if it would be any help to the college that I was still continuing there, you know. In other words, I kind of well — Just that, you know. That I had made up my mind to leave, regardless, but I did it in the form of leave of absence so that, you know, it would appear that there was not just Olson. I don't know whether other people had done, did anything like that or not. I don't know if Wes did, whether he had planned to stay on, or what. But that was the reason for that.

**MEH:** But you really had no intention of returning.

**JF:** No. No. I mean I think I'd had it at that point.

**MEH:** What effect do you think Charles's affair with Betty Keiser, and the split with Connie had on the community?

**JF:** I couldn't say. I don't know, I just couldn't say.

**MEH:** What about you and Mary? How did this effect you and Mary, and your relationship to the college?

**JF:** Well I don't know. I mean we — we were both very fond of Connie. I mean not that we disliked or had anything against Betty at all. But that was a

little upsetting to us that, you know, because we were so fond of Connie.

Seemed closer to her, in a way, certainly than Charles. But anyway, I couldn't say what, you know — I think — I don't know. I don't remember the year of that. Cleaning of the stables. That was the year. Was that '55?

**MEH:** I can't remember now.

**JF:** I can't remember either. It may have been. There was hardly anybody there that could do anything about it. Cleaning the stables on Christmas Eve day!

**MEH:** It was Christmas Eve day?

**JF:** Yes, yes.

**MEH:** Did everybody take part?

**JF:** Yes, except for Stefan, who was having problems, physical problems.

**MEH:** This was after a cow had died?

**JF:** Well, I think — I think it was before that cow died, because I remember burying that cow. It was the next week or something like that. The ground was very hard, you know. Frozen. But cleaning the stables was — I don't know, that one cow must have been already far gone or something, you know.

**MEH:** What prompted the cleaning of the stables on Christmas Eve? Was it a crisis, a particular crisis?

**JF:** Well, yes, because the farmers had left. Oh, who was there at the time? Was that — It wasn't Ray Trayer. It was--

**MEH:** Cliff Moles. Was he still there?

**JF:** No. Can't remember. I know it. Oh! Jesus, I can't remember his name. The last farmer, whoever it was. Now, I can't remember his name. No, he had left and I guess nobody knew about it. Somehow somebody discovered that, you know, here was all this, two feet of manure, and so we had to do it. Well, after that everybody sort of went back to their own places and, you know — But we went out that night and serenaded, sang Christmas carols. We stopped at Stefan's down there at Black Dwarf and he said oh, he thought it was the most wonderful sound – he and Hilda (LAUGHS). And we stopped at Olson's, and Connie sort of came to the door. They were still together, but I think either Charles Peter was – had been born or was about to be or something. So, Olson didn't come out.

**MEH:** This was you and Mary singing?

**JF:** Yes, yes. So.

**MEH:** Were you there when they had the automobile accident?

**JF:** Yes. Yes, that was a sad thing. That was a sad thing.

**MEH:** What do you remember about Creeley at Black Mountain?

**JF:** Creeley. I don't know. One thing I remember about him was he, I think it was shortly after he arrived there, not too long after anyway, he came up to visit us and spent two or three hours just telling of all his, you know, kind of problems with his wife or whatever, and wife's problems, and everything. It was sort of a strange experience, you know. He was somebody we didn't even know, really. I don't know. We weren't that close



to Creeley. People that were closer to him. Dan Rice, and Cynthia, and a few other people. Dorn, Joel, I don't know. I can't remember.

**MEH:** What did you do when you left the college? Did you move to New York then?

**JF:** Yes. Yes. Yes, we came — Well, I went up first, and got around and ran into Joe Stefanelli, who knew about a place on 29th Street. There was an artist, Ray Hendler and his wife, they had not had the place that long, but somebody came down the fire escape once and that was, you know — They had window guards and everything, but that was enough. It scared them out. So they left the place, so we took it. Then I went back to Black Mountain, had a — We didn't have that much furniture or anything. We had, I think, four collapsible chairs or something like that, and a piano — that piano! (LAUGHS) Which had traveled from San Francisco to Black Mountain then up to New York.

**MEH:** Susanna was born at that point?

**JF:** No. She was born here. She was —

**MEH:** What about Tom? He's older?

**JF:** Yes, Tom was born there. Yes, he was born in '55 — December. December 7, as a matter of fact. So he was, yeah, he was here. Susanna was born in '58, September. Then there were a couple of pieces by Albers that Olson was trying to sell, and he somehow convinced me that I would be agent, you know, to take these Albers' — I don't know if it was Sidney Janis. I'm not sure. But Albers wrote a letter to me, you know, claiming

somehow that these paintings were not part of the, they were not property of the college. They were his property. I don't remember now what happened, whether they were eventually sold or what. But that was a little bone of contention there after the college had closed. What else?

**MEH:** Do you remember now when you heard that they were going to close the college what your thinking was?

**JF:** Well, my thinking was what it had been, you know, it had been a certain way. It was — The nature of the college, the people that were there, the ideas that were about — that were of a character that it couldn't really, it couldn't really last as it was. I mean it had performed its, you know, useful task. And I think I still feel that way, although as I said before, it has had an influence, you know, on subsequent events and (UNINTELL WORD) and so on. My feeling, and you know well that my contention that you can't put yourself in that situa —

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**