

Interviewee: DAVID CORKRAN
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. David, how old were you when you first came to Black Mountain?

DC: I was between nine and ten. Closer to ten.

MEH: Where had you been before that?

DC: Our family had been living with my grandmother in Glens Falls, New York, where we had moved after my father became ill in 1943. My sister was killed in an automobile accident in 1942 when my father was teaching at the Northshore Country Day School in Winnetka, Illinois. After that he began having emotional difficulties and was in and out of hospitals. It's not clear to me why we left, why we left Winnetka but we wound up in Granville, I mean in Glens Falls, New York, and I can remember Ted Dreier showing up one December day and my father introduced John and me to Ted and then we got in the family car and we drove up to Lake George, which was ten miles north of Glens Falls. We went on up the lake a little bit along the side, and we stopped at one point. It was getting dark, and we walked out on the ice. There was two inches of snow on the ice and it was dusk, and Pop and Ted Dreier were talking about Black Mountain. We scraped a place off the ice so that we could run and slide on it. It was snowing. Pop and Ted are talking about Black Mountain while we kids are playing and not paying very much attention. Then we got back in the car and drove back to Glens Falls, and Ted Dreier stayed the night and departed the next day. Three or four days later, Mom said "Well, we're going to go to North Carolina to live." Well, that wasn't too exciting to us boys because we had been—we had been in school in Winnetka, and then we had been in school in Glens Falls, and then here we were going to go to another school. So—just like that! [CLAPS HANDS] All in a year. So it was a little bit disruptive but that's the first time that I heard about Black Mountain.

MEH: That was the wintertime.

DC: That was the winter-

MEH: Did you go mid-term?

Dc: We got there in January. We got there in January of 1945.

MEH: So the War was still on then.

DC: Yeah, the War was still on. Moore General Hospital had been constructed at the old State Test Farm, down the road about two and a half or three miles. You went by it when you went up to the college. We went into the public schools in Black Mountain for about a month and didn't survive. It was a little too big of a change, so we then went into Asheville into Asheville Country Day School. The headmistress, who lived in Black Mountain, would pick us up and take us in with

her in the morning and Mom would drive us down the road to Moore General. I can remember the trains coming in from Europe with the wounded soldiers on them. The siding was right there. You just waited. These trains, full of guys in bandages, just carload after carload of them came in. They must have come right off the boat in Norfolk, Virginia or something like that and then come right down on the Southern Railroad. Moore V.A. Hospital was, you know, it was just huge.

MEH: Boy, that must have really fired the imagination of a young boy—or the fears of a young boy.

DC: No, it didn't. We waved, you know, so we felt like we were doing our part in the war effort.

MEH: Your father, before he came to Black Mountain, had been involved in progressive education.

DC: Yes, very much so.

MEH: On the pre-college level.

DC: Yeah. Very much so.

MEH: Would that be—I mean, yeah, Winnetka County Day School.

DC: Northshore Country Day. [OVERTALK]

MEH: Northshore Country Day School was through high school?

DC: Yes.

MEH: So, he was teaching in the high school.

DC: He taught in the high school.

MEH: So, do you remember your first impression of Black Mountain College on arrival?

DC: Oh, yeah. We walked into the dining hall as dinner was in progress, and everybody clapped. There were probably fifty or sixty people in there. Ted Dreier introduced Pop as a new teacher. John and I and Mom were there so everybody clapped. I remember that.

MEH: And so you went to school—this was a problem for a lot of people. Apparently the Black Mountain schools were pretty dreadful.

DC: Yeah, they were. The grade school was nothing to brag about. I will not go into my grade school experiences, but they'd be appalling to most people in education today. If you thought about an inner-city school today, it would be similar to—except the adults would have more control. But it was—We went to Asheville Country Day for two years—Let's see. We got there in the fifth grade, or the fourth grade, and then we went to Asheville Country Day in fifth and sixth, and then went to Black Mountain in the seventh grade. From there on, my brother and I were in the Black Mountain school system. The high school really wasn't that bad. It couldn't compare with the Northshore Country Day School. But the teachers were—the teachers were caring individuals and some of them were quite competent. So it was, it was an interesting high school experience, and one that—I remember my father saying to me “You will never give your children the education that you've got.” What he meant was that for five years we'd been at Black Mountain College where we had sat at the dinner table and listened to discussions of every conceivable subject under the sun and had been listened to, when we had something to say. Then we went to a public high school where the first priority was football. The second priority was girls. You know, the fifth priority was your studies, you know. But you got an experience with people who were vastly different from you in background—in both places. I mean, the people

from—the people at Black Mountain, there was a heavy contingent of New Yorkers, very urban outlook, very cosmopolitan and highly rarefied. At Black Mountain High School, very earthy, very prosaic, not at all academic. A lot of common sense. We left the college in 1950 after my freshman year in high school, and so there was this split in this experience. The great hey-day in the college had been between 1945 and 1949. After 1949, there weren't as many students and a lot of the faculty were new and—well, from my standpoint, a lot of the vigor of the place was gone. It was in decline.

MEH: Didn't your father stay in the Asheville area for a while?

DC: Yes, we lived the town of Black Mountain for four years after he left.

MEH: Did you finish school there?

DC: I finished high school there. You bet. As a matter of fact, he moved us into town so that we would finish high school there—John and I would finish high school there. Then he went right back to Chicago—by that time, his illness was better—and taught at the Frances Parker School and then at Roosevelt University. So, this, this period at Black Mountain, between 1945 and 1954, when he was at the college for five and a half years and then in the town of Black Mountain for three and a half, was a period in which he left sort of the thing he'd been doing and went in a slightly different channel for a while and then sort of went back to what he'd been doing.

MEH: Was he working when he was in the town of Black Mountain, after he left the college?

DC: No. He was not. I do not know how our family survived. Rent was fifteen dollars a month, and you paid your own heating bills, and you bought two cords of wood and about six cubic feet of coal. Then every morning you stoked the coal stove in the kitchen, built a fireplace in one of the living rooms, and then there was an oil heater in the other one. Otherwise, the house was unheated. So, that time at Black Mountain he deliberately stayed there so that his kids would be exposed to small town environment, personable environment. He didn't like the religion of the Southern churches, but he felt that that kind of environment was important for his children to grow up in. I don't know how my parents survived for four years down there. I do know that I was encouraged to work, at the drop of a hat. My brother and I were—Let's see—My brother joined the Baptist church, to my parents' dismay. He and I were janitors in the Presbyterian church. My father went to the Methodist church, because he liked the minister's sermons. The Methodist minister played football with us on Sundays—on Saturday afternoons, behind the parsonage.

MEH: Do you remember the Methodist minister's name?

DC: Sure. Thad McDonald. Yeah. He was a great—he was a great man. I met him—the first time I met him was the last softball game that I played for Black Mountain College. There was a summer softball league, and softball was big at Black Mountain College. Nobody could play very well, but the town summer league arranged an All Star, two All Star games. They had the second string All Stars and the first string All Stars. So they invited the college team to play the second string all stars. Well, the college didn't have a team. It was simply pick-up. So about fourteen people from the college went out there and I was the—I was the catcher. I was thirteen years old, and I was the catcher and I

caught for Fielding Dawson, who threw windmill pitches and who was wild. I mean he was wild. I was his catcher, and so Fielding Dawson pitched that night and they just—they creamed him. [LAUGHS] That was the last time I played softball with people from Black Mountain College. We'd already moved into town, but they needed somebody to catch for them, so I played and Mr. McDonald was on the second team All Stars. So, I got on second base and somebody singled to center and I tore around third base and I slid into Mr. McDonald. You know, God, just tore right into him. The ball got there about the same time I got there. Mr. McDonald goes flying, the ball goes flying, and I'm a big, tough 13-year-old kid. I look up and Mr. McDonald is getting up and he's got the most Christian smile on his face. You know. It was just this beautiful smile. I tell you, I feel guilty yet (LAUGHS). He was a wonderful man. I got interested in a girl who was a staunch Methodist, and she inveigled me into the Methodist Youth Fellowship for about two months. Mr. McDonald—I'll never forget—I've always had very strong opinions and having been at the college, you know, I was used to discussing things with adults and what not. Mr. McDonald—the whole subject of the United Nations and war and whatnot came up and I made some speech at the Methodist Youth Fellowship, about, you know, the need for the United Nations. Here I'm, you know, fifteen or sixteen years old. Mr. McDonald was sitting there listening and some other people speak about things, and then Mr. McDonald just kind of says, "I want to reemphasize something David said," you know, and he gave this nice little speech which sort of, was just sort of a confirmation. That was enormously impressive to me because my father loved Mr. McDonald's sermons. McDonald was a preacher who really thought, and my father's father had been an expositor of the Bible, rather than a guy who exhorted. He was an expositor, and he'd study his Latin and Greek and go through the Bible and pick out passages and say, "Okay, this is what that means." McDonald did the same thing and my father was—just liked to listen to him and listen to his thinking, because he thought out loud. Well, I didn't have any truck with religion, so—I never, I went to a couple of Mr. McDonald's sermons a couple times but Pop used to come home and talk about them. So McDonald was—as I look back on it, he was the first really pretty—I think highly of him and I think even more highly of him as the years go on because he was the one guy in that town who invited a black preacher into his pulpit. My father went and about seven other parishioners went out of a congregation of normally forty or fifty. So McDonald was, you know, he was a real Christian. He was active in the community, just a wonderful guy. But he wasn't going to get very far with that.

MEH: So what was it like to be a kid at Black Mountain College?

DC: Well, I was never a kid anywhere else, you know, between age 10 and 15, so I don't know. First of all, you sat in the dining hall, and you heard these discussions and these conversations, and, of course, as a kid, you're not going to offer much. But you learn to listen. So, one of the—one of the things that I think I got out of that was just listening, you know—how to listen. The second thing was that after you listened for a couple of years, you began to be able to distinguish what was good from what wasn't. So, by the time I was about twelve or thirteen, I think I had a good idea of what was solid and what wasn't. So, I think that—And the other thing was that, you know, it was a bunch of young kids, a bunch of

students. Now I didn't realize that. I'm eleven, twelve years old, okay? But they're basically young kids, and young kids are full of B.S. Okay? I think that somehow I began to detect that at a fairly young age. Once you begin to figure that out, then you begin to see where common sense comes in. Common sense will replace B.S. any time. You can sound profound—if people are B.S.ing and then you make a commonsense observation, you'll sound profound. So, I got to the point where I could make common sense observations and people would listen to my views, you know, as a twelve-year-old. That's kind of a heady thing. It gives you confidence, I think, that you can talk with anybody. So I think that gave me a level of confidence in verbal articulation that I would say was a definite influence of the college and that I do not think I would have had had I not been at Black Mountain. The second great influence, I think, was Manvel Schauffler and a farmer named Cliff Moles. Schauff had just gotten out of the navy, and I was eleven years old in 1946. He walked up to me one day. I'd hardly ever seen him before, and he says "Hi. I'm Manvel Schauffler. I know you're Dave Corkran and you're the spittin' image of your old man." Boy, you know, just bang like that, you know. Now that impresses an eleven-year-old kid. What he did was that somehow he took me under his wing. I mean, he just said to me "Come here," and so I came. He said, "Here," and he handed me a dishtowel. He said, "Let's wipe these plates," you know. So he starts talking to me as we wipe these plates. The next day I was going through the kitchen, and he says, "Come here," so I came. He says, "Here, scrape these plates off," and he hands me a rubber, you know, scraper and so I'm scraping the garbage into the garbage can, and he's talking, you know. He's asking me what I'm doing, what school's like, all this stuff, you know. Well, it isn't very long before he's got me out in the woods, on the other end of a cross-cut saw, with Cliff Moles and a bunch of other guys and we're sawing down trees with which to build some building—I think the milk shed in the barn or something like that. He's got me—At eleven years old he put me in a truck and said, "Here's how you drive this thing," you know. So, I'm driving truck at eleven years old. I nearly killed him because he said "We've gotta get these logs out of the woods." There were some small logs. So he hooked a cable to one end and hooked the cable to the truck. He says "Okay, you get in there and you start the thing up slowly and we'll drag these logs out of the way." Well my foot slipped off the clutch, you know, and so the truck jerked and the cable came loose, and I heard this yell behind me. I got the truck stopped and I turned around that Schauff was holding his head where the cable grazed him across the forehead. You know another two inches and he'd have been history and my life would have totally different. Does that stop that guy? Not one bit. I'm back driving the truck the next day, you know. So just his attitude toward work and his attitude toward kids. Pretty soon I'm following Schauffler around like he's God. He's got me into everything. You know, I'm pitching hay—I'm not pitching hay, I was too small, so what did they do?—I was too young. What did they do? They'd put me up on top of the truck, and Cliff Moles, the farmer, says "I'll tell you what to do." He gives me a pitchfork and they put the hay up on the back on the wagon and pretty soon I'm stuffing a load of hay here and stuffing a load of hay there and tromping it down, and the next thing I know I'm fourteen feet up in the air on the load of hay, you know. They say, "Okay, Dave, you can get down." I get down and

that load of hay goes off there, and I look back at it and I say, “My gosh, I built that load of hay!” See, that was the genius of those guys. They said to a kid, “Do this, do that, do the other thing,” and the first thing you knew, you’d done something. Now, you know, that was the days when men labored, where it was easy to do that kind of thing, where you could be useful, a twelve-, thirteen-year-old kid could be useful. So—I think that does a great deal for a young person’s confidence. You see the results of what you did with your hands, and so on. That was—that was one of the things. You were around guys who knew how to work, who made it fun, who were just naturally interested in people, and then you were around these other people—the students, most of the students, art students and whatnot—who had the potential to be interesting people, or were characters, or who were—well, I don’t know. A lot of them seemed to me to be very eccentric people, and I was not into eccentric people at that point, okay. [LAUGHS] So, and so a lot of what I heard I regarded as, you know, not worth listening to, but I listened and I learned how to be relaxed around adults. There weren’t very many other kids. I think that influenced me too because as a young person, I related to adults much better than I related to kids, and I find it highly ironic now that I relate better to kids. But I think it had something to do with the way Schauff and others treated me and accepted me as kind of an adult, when I was really a kid. Because kids want that. They like to be accepted as adults. They will act more adult if they feel that they are.

MEH: Are there other people you remember that left particularly vivid memories for you at the college?

DC: Cliff Moles. Cliff was—Cliff was about 5-7, 5-8, and he had been a conscientious objector during World War Two. He and Ray Trayer had been conscientious objectors, and they had worked in mental hospitals during the War. Cliff and Schauff made quite a team, and they were always joking around with each other. Cliff showed me a lot about just how to do things—how to pick up hay on the end of a pitchfork, how to build hay on a wagon, how to drive a tractor, and stuff like that. He was a fine man. Finally, when he left the college, he went to Iowa and rented a farm. The summer that I was sixteen he hired me on his farm. So I traveled from Black Mountain to Shenandoah, Iowa, and spent two and a half months working on his farm. I thought I knew how to work before I got there, but man, I dragged ass the first month. I mean, he’d wake me up at five o’clock, and I was so tired from the day before I’d go back to sleep. I’d say, “Yeah, Cliff, I’m coming.” Bam! Went back to sleep. Then Shirley, his wife, would get me up for breakfast. But I’ll tell you, after a month, once I got broken in, you know, was able to—Man, I mean it was—you know, physically I could work twelve or fourteen hours a day, and I just grew as strong as an ox, and when I went back, back to high school, I was able to play on the football team, you know. I had played two years before but I had an injured left knee, as a sophomore, and hadn’t played hardly at all. But boy that thing built that thing back up that summer and, you know, I was just much stronger and much tougher, and I had a much better work ethic. That, you know that has—that’s helped shape me for the rest of my life. I mean, I still don’t think anything about working a sixty- or eighty-hour week. I just don’t think anything about it, and that’s because when I worked for Cliff Moles, by god, that’s what you did, and you didn’t even think about it. That was just what

you did, and the results were that you got strong as an ox and you were working with a fine man. He was just a fine man. Just an ordinary farmer, but he was a fine man. A tremendous role model, just—I disagreed with him about his pacifism, and we used to argue about it. But you just couldn't ask for a sweeter disposition or a guy who was a better neighbor. All his neighbors loved him. He was right next to a big farmer, some old curmudgeon who was the most notorious skinflint in the county. The guy asked Cliff to do a fence for him one time. Cliff did a fence for him, and then Cliff went back and straightened up all the poles so you could right down the line and you couldn't—you saw one fencepost all the way for a half mile. This guy had never had anybody build a fence for him like that. So what does he do? He drives his bull—his prize bull—into Cliff's pasture so that the bull fertilizes all of Cliff's cows, and that means that Cliff's calves are going to be super calves. So he donates several hundred dollars to Cliff just—Everybody says "Jeez, he did that? He's never been known to do that." That's just the kind of guy Cliff Moles was. He was just a very strong, rugged, honest, hardworking—

MEH: Is he still living?

DC: No, he died—

MEH: Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

DC: Yeah. No, he died in the early '70s when he was about sixty. He never—he finally acquired eighty acres in Iowa, but the farm prices were always against him, and he was never able to buy his own farm and really become self-sufficient. He always had to rent and he wanted to be self-sufficient. Finally, toward the end of his life, he lightened up a little bit and took part in the first bicycle ride across Iowa. You know, at age 59 or something like that. So he—I mean he's just this hardworking guy who was very self-effacing, did his damndest, a great Boy Scout leader and pillar of the church, and just a wonderful guy who embodied all the great American ethics but never, never made it. It didn't—he didn't let it bother him. He wanted to make it but he knew there was more to life than that. Really neat guy. Unappreciated at Black Mountain. I mean, most of the people at Black Mountain were not into the work program. Most of the students could of—It was something you went out and you picked up the corn shocks, you know, but Cliff Moles [LAUGHS]—Cliff Moles was picking up corn shocks one day. Cliff was about the size of Manville Schauffler. They were both very small guys. So Cliff picks up—Schauff is up on the wagon. You'd pick up the corn shocks, a whole bunch of corn stalks, and you'd bring them over and you'd hoist them up to the guy in the wagon. So, Moles comes striding up with this load of corn shocks. Then he just kind of flips it up off his shoulder and Schauff reaches down to get it. Then Moles walks out from underneath it. Well, it was so heavy that Schauff went down like a stone, you know. He just goes off the side of the wagon [LAUGHS] onto the ground, holding on to this bunch—Moles had made it look easy, you know, but it must have weighed 150 pounds because Schauffler was, you know, he was just—Moles was walking off, you know, just with this grin on his face because of course he's plotted the whole thing out. But that was the sort of thing that happened there, you know. Those guys loved to work, and they kidded around when they did it. So—There was always something going on like that if Schauff and Moles were around. I remember—Well, Schauff and the boys used to get soused on Saturday night, okay? They used to have these beer parties

and then there was other stuff around too, you know. They were all veterans and, you know, they were used to drinking. So, one Saturday night they had all got looped, really looped. Well, Moles was a temperance man, okay. He'd taken the oath of temperance. Every morning, the farmers would bring the milk down on the tractor. So, Moles brought the milk down on Sunday morning about six o'clock in the morning, and then he drove the tractor right up next to what was called the Brown Cottage, which was to the east of—west of the dining hall, about forty or fifty yards. He drove that thing right up next to the window where the bed was, and then he wound it up just as high as he could. He's about eight inches from Schauff's head. Schauff is in the upper bunk in this thing. He winds that thing up as far as he can and, you know, he just about knocks those guys with their hangovers right out of the bed. [LAUGHS] So, he's laughing like a maniac, and then these guys are stumbling around, thinking Hitler's coming in or something, you know. So, about that evening when they've recovered, somebody had—They'd picked a bunch of cabbages and they'd left them by the cooling units for the coolers in the dining hall, and they started to rot. So here comes Moles on his tractor with the evening milk supply. Schauff starts throwing rotten cabbages at him, you know. So, there's this war right in the middle of the campus, with guys throwing rotten cabbages. Well, it's that kind of horseplay that impresses a kid, you know. That's one of the funny memories is of Schauff and Cliff Moles kind of exchanging these jokes or one-upmanship or whatever. But they worked together really well. Really well. They had great respect for each other. It was just fun to be around them.

MEH: Where did your family live?

DC: We lived in something called Meadows Inn. Meadows Inn was on a ridge between two streams. The farm was to the north, and then there was a stream to the south of the farm and a ridge. Meadows Inn was on that. I forget the name of the house where Albers and Dreier lived, but that was to the southwest. Then there was another stream, deeply-incised stream, which ran down just to the north of the Studies Building. There was a path from Meadows Inn, where we lived, down to another, down to the business office and the other buildings—I mean, residence halls in there. Then there was a bridge across this stream and then you got to the road into the Studies Building. So, we lived up on that ridge at a place called Meadows Inn, between the two streams. Mrs. Jalowetz lived up the road, or up the driveway to Meadows Inn, above us, on the main road that went up to the farm. Up above that there were two new buildings called Last Chance, and that was where—it was a student dorm up there. Then the road curved around, split and went one way back into the woods, up behind the North and South Lodges, to a knoll up there. Then the other fork went around to the farm.

MEH: Did you have like an apartment in the cottage? Did you share it with another family?

DC: Yes, we did. We shared it with the Dehns, first—Max Dehn and Mrs. Dehn, Toni Dehn. Then later we shared it with the Rondthalers, Howard Rondthaler, Senior, and Alice and Bobby and Howard Junior. No—Theodore Rondthaler. It was Theodore Rondthaler. Howard was the son. So we occupied the ground floor. They occupied the upstairs. We heated the building with a coal fired furnace in

the bottom, and every morning when I got older, I'd go down and shake down the furnace and start the heat up. But we also heated it with a fireplace, and I can remember sawing through two-foot thick oak logs, maybe two-and-a-half-foot thick oak logs—way up in the woods up above the, up above Last Chance, and then rolling those logs, which were—we'd saw them into about three-and-a-half foot lengths, two feet in diameter, and we rolled them downhill into the front door of Meadows Inn and into the fireplace where we built a fire and in front of this huge log and the log would burn for about three days. So, we heated it with a fireplace and with the stove. The fireplace was huge. I mean, you could get in with the fire. It had a yellow poplar mantelpiece over it, which was, you know, split logs with yellow poplar, a piece of yellow poplar. But it was a—it was quite a chore to saw those things up and then roll them a quarter-to-half mile downhill and then get them into the fireplace. But we did that. We did that about once or twice a week, all winter.

MEH: Other particular memories of the college?

DC: My brother's written about the softball games, and I remember those. It was pick-up softball. My brother's written about the football teams. My brother and I were into football and softball, and so we played every chance we got. There was always a student out there who was going to throw the ball with us or something like that. You've probably heard—I don't know if you interviewed my father, but he probably told you about the famous hike that he took to Mount Mitchell with students.

MEH: Right. I'm not sure if I remember that.

DC: Okay. Well, he took a group of students up to—The way you went to Mount Mitchell was that you got a ride over to Montreat, and then you hiked up behind Montreat to the old Toll Road, which goes—went to Mount Mitchell. It was about three or four miles up from Montreat, and then you got on the Toll Road and went three or four miles on the Toll Road, and then you hiked up on the Blue Ridge Parkway, which hadn't been completed. It wasn't completed till '49 or something like that. Then you hit the Mount Mitchell Toll Road, and you went up there. You hit the—oh, the road—well, it went off the parkway and you walked up that. So, he took a group of students up there once, and one of the girls got terribly sick, just terribly sick, and Pop was really concerned and he went off—I mean she was throwing up, and she was crying and she was gasping. Pop finally went off and found a ranger, and the ranger was able to contact the college. Mom drove down to Old Fort and then drove up from Old Fort, because that was the only way you could go. It took hours. You could hike to Mount Mitchell faster than you drive to it, in those days from Black Mountain. So she left at about two in the morning and at five in the morning Pop could see the lights, you know, way down in the valley from her because she was the only car moving. It took her another hour and a half to get there, you know. So she gets there and this gal is fine. This gal is fine, you know. Well what she'd done—she'd gotten into some white lightning, you know, and [LAUGHS]—Somebody had brought along some white lightning, and she'd taken a few slugs of that it just, you know, turned her inside out. But it took a long time for that to come out because she was not about to say anything, you know. Well, she was just fine by the time Mom got there, but of course she wasn't going to say anything about it. But finally it came out. Yeah, I remember that.

That was a big scandal because it caused no end of trouble, you know. Pop had to run around in the dark and find a ranger, and it took him a long time to roust the ranger out. The ranger was skeptical as hell and finally he called, and then, you know, it took—They got the business office, but there was nobody in the business office and the guy let the phone ring for about twenty minutes. Finally somebody from an adjoining apartment got in there, you know. I mean, it was just hours before the word got through and then hours before anybody could get there. We think—I mean it was almost back in the Dark Ages. We might as well have sent a runner. [LAUGHS] So, that was a big thing. I remember hiking. I remember hiking with old Dr. Dehn up on Blue Ridge, which is to the south of the Swannanoa River.

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DC: I remember going with old Dr. Dehn, and he and I were the last ones there. He said something like, “Well, the slower I go, the more likely I am to get there.” He loved to hike. He just loved to hike. He loved to hike so much that when he got sick one time, and it was raining, his wife Toni told him he couldn’t go hiking. Max got on his coat and hat, and he started down the stairs at Meadows Inn. It was an outside staircase, and my father saw him coming down. Now Dr. Dehn had been arguing with his wife for days about going hiking, okay, and Pop knew about the argument. Pop grabbed the broomstick. He went out around the side of the house. Dr. Dehn was coming down, and Pop comes around the corner and he says, “Max, you are not going hiking.” My grandmother said, “Dr. Dehn turned tail and sprang up those stairs just like a cat and turned around and looked at your father and then he went back inside.” So, that was the story that Grandmother told, anyway. I can’t vouch for its veracity.

MEH: What was Max Dehn like?

DC: Small, white-haired guy. Meek—seemed meek to me. Very quiet. But a real sparkle in the eye. Just a real sparkle. You know, he was kind of bent over. He was a small old bent-over man, and he just kept walking. He just kept walking. He loved to walk.

MEH: What do you think your father thought about the college?

DC: My father has left several fragments in writing about the college. He was in despair, frequently. He claims that when he was Rector, he left—he went north, secured funding, and then had the faculty pull the rug out from underneath him. This is in late 1949 or 1950. Whether or not that’s the case, I have no way of knowing. He was in and out of mental hospitals for extended periods when he was there, especially in 1949. I don’t know—the treatments they were giving mental patients at that time had side effects or what you would call—what they call side-effects. They’re just effects as far as I’m concerned. So, I can’t be sure that his memory or his perception of what was going on was accurate. I know that when Martin Duberman wrote his book, that he contacted Pop when he was well into the writing of the book, and somewhere there’s a letter from Duberman, and I don’t know where it is, which says that Pop’s testimony throws an entirely different light on what happened at Black Mountain College, but that Duberman is too far along on the book to corroborate it. Okay. In other words, here’s this—here’s this piece of evidence from a person who was there, and it’s inconvenient for Duberman to follow the lead out, you know. Well, right there my

respect for Duberman as an historian disappeared. Although he does have—he has some good stuff from the early years of the college in his book, and I can see in that the same—I can see the same sort of thing reflected in Black Mountain in the Catlin-Gabel School. But I think that’s mostly progressive education theory, and so I’m not sure that that would be one of the things you could say—in a way you could say Black Mountain influenced Catlin Gabel. But my father had very mixed feelings about it. The thing that he loved was his walks in the woods, and he learned all the wildflowers and one day—

MEH: You’re talking about your father.

DC: My father, yeah. One day he picked up a whole bunch of arrowheads out in front of the Meadows Inn, been washed, turned up by a heavy rain. That led him to finally write a book on the Cherokees and a book on the Creeks and a book on the Iroquois, and he became a scholar of what they now call ethnohistory—in American Indian ethnohistory. He did—they said he did some pioneering work in it, and that was all because of Black Mountain. So, he developed something of a reputation as a scholar in American ethnohistory, and his work was thought rather highly of by scholars in the field.

MEH: When your father was in and out of hospitals, did you stay at Black Mountain?

DC: Yes, we did. We stayed—we stayed in the college.

MEH: Was he in hospitals in the area or did he go back north?

DC: He was in hospitals in the area, usually down around Chapel Hill or Durham or Raleigh—state institutions, yeah.

MEH: When you graduated from high school, what did you do?

DC: One of my classmates and his family were going to St. Louis. I got a ride with them to St. Louis. I got on the bus and I came to Oregon, and I spent the summer of 1953 on a fire lookout in Oregon. Because of the influence of Howard Rondthaler, who had come out here three years before and who’d gotten work with the Forest Service and written—he said “You like to run around in the woods. If you want to work in the woods, let me know.” I had run around in the North Carolina woods with Howard Rondthaler, and here’s how it went. Summer evenings at the intermission of the concerts—and this has to 1948 or ’49, okay—Howard Rondthaler would start going around to students and saying, “Why don’t we climb Mount Mitchell tonight?” Okay, now this is nine o’clock at night, okay? So, he’d round up six or eight students and a stray faculty member or two, you know, and he’d find somebody to drive us over to Montreat. Okay. So there’d be eight or nine or ten of us piled into some old jalopy. The drive to Montreat took about a half hour, even though it was about six miles, okay. [LAUGHS] Then we’d set off at about eleven at night, if it was a moonlit night. It was always a moonlit night so you could see what the hell you were doing. We’d climb up through the rhododendron brush on this path and lots of times you could, all you could do was feel it. We’d go sometimes hand in hand, you know, so that we wouldn’t—so people wouldn’t get lost. We got up to the toll road—and then the moon would be out, because the toll road would be open and you could see. We’d hike to the—at about three o’clock in the morning, we would arrive at this deserted summer home, where there was a pool—a pond, a spring-fed pond, and we’d camp there. We’d camp until seven or eight in the morning, okay. So, we’d get four or five hours of sleep. Then we’d hike to the top of Mount Mitchell,

which was about three and a half miles, four miles, after having gone seven or eight the preceding night. Then we'd walk all the way home. So, you know, you did sixteen miles on Sunday after having done eight on Saturday night, and you got back and, of course, your ass was dragging, you know. But it was great fun, you know. It was great fun. Rondy used to do it barefoot. [LAUGHS] But that's where I began running around in the woods with him. So, I don't know if—I think I would have gravitated out here anyway, but that was definitely a connection which pointed me in this direction. The fact that he got work in the forest service and the fact that I had worked in the woods with Schauff and Cliff Moles and Rondy and learned how to use an axe and learned how to use a cross-cut saw, and learned how to saw through logs and stuff like that—You know, I could come out here and I knew the ropes. I wasn't green. So the forest service, after the first summer, you know—I came back for six more summers and worked my way through college and partway through graduate school, working for the forest service. That too is a Black Mountain influence, because where else would you have gotten practice with hand tools, unless you were actually—You know, where else would a city kid, a suburban kid, a kid from the upper middle class—which is what my parents were—have gotten that experience? I had the advantages of going to a great school, the Northshore Country Day School for the first four or five grades of my school career. Then I had to advantage of going to Black Mountain College as a—I mean not going there but being a faculty brat there where there were all these stimulating people. But at the same time, you were learning how to do farm work, how to do forest work, so you're learning how to work with your hands, and then going into town and growing—spending teenage years in a small town where everybody knows you, you know everybody. People can hassle you about your religion. They can compliment you when you make a good block in the football game. You know. It's so personal, and that's great for kids. So, as my dad said, "You'll never do that for your children." He was right. Because you couldn't—you couldn't duplicate that kind of experience. There are only fifteen or twenty kids who had that experience, you know, going—being faculty brats at Black Mountain College, and most of them weren't there as long as John and I were. None of them went through that high school. Well, there were two, Katharine Rondthaler—"Bobby" Rondthaler—did and then Dr. Brown's daughter, Petra Brown—or granddaughter. Or Dr. Miller's granddaughter, Petra Brown, went through Black Mountain College. I mean Black Mountain High School. Bobby Rondthaler went through there and maybe Buzzy Brown did after, after we left, but I—

MEH: Who was Buzzy Brown?

DC: She was Miller's granddaughter, other granddaughter. But they had left the college long since so—I can't, you know, that's fuzzy for me. But the point is that John and I had this experience and we were about the only ones in our generation—Estelle Levi, young Dreier—Eddie Dreier, the Lowinsky kids were younger. Angie—

MEH: Bodky?

DC: Bodky was older. The closest people to us were Howard and Bobby Rondthaler. I remember I used to—Schauff—Schauff got me into clerking at the student store, and I was—Rondy was the store clerk. Schauff kept the books, and I was

Rondy's assistant. There was an apple tree out in front of the dining hall—crab apple tree. The student store was in the dining hall, just to the right of the entrance and there was a window looking out over the entrance hall. I got a stick and I was going to throw an apple down to the tennis courts, which were about 200 yards away, okay? So I wound up—I had this three-foot stick. I'd learned how to do this in New Hampshire a couple of years before, several years before. So I was going to throw this thing a million miles. So I wound up and I just threw that—only it didn't come off the end of the stick. The thing came around, the stick came around like this and kind of—my arm came across my body so it stopped. But then the apple came off the stick, and it went right through the window. [LAUGHS] Rondy was in the store. I mean, that apple was going damn fast when it went through that window, and there was another student in there and the apple bounced off the ceiling and then off the wall and then by Rondy's head and then by, you know—I mean, it caromed around the room and ricocheted around the room, you know. Oh, man. Well, anyway, I spent the rest of the day putting that window—putting a new pane of glass into that window, you know. But it's one of those days, you know, when a kid innocently does something and regrets it for the rest of his life [LAUGHS], you know.

MEH: At least for the rest of the day.

DC: For the rest of the day. Well, I still think oh God, you know, I could have skulled Rondy with it. It's like the truck and Schauff with the cable going for him. You always think "whoa, ugh." So, those, you have very vivid impressions of that kind of stuff.

MEH: So, where did you go to college?

DC: Middlebury College in Vermont.

MEH: And how did you get involved in Catlin-Gabel?

DC: After the army, I—Well, when I came out here in 1953, I came out here because Howard "Rondy" Rondthaler had worked for the Forest Service and helped me get this job. But I knew that Schauff and Verna were out here. One of the first—the first thing I did when I got here was to walk from downtown Portland up to Schauff and Verna's house, which is up near where you had the hamburger or something. It was five miles or something—carrying my pack—and went and visited them. So, I knew that Schauff was working at various schools, and, of course, it was the same school because he got into Hillside School about 1949, I think, and he was with the Catlin Hillside School and then the Catlin Gabel School from '49 to 1980. So, you know, 31 years. But I went through college and got out of the army in 1959 and went to graduate school at the University of California at Berkeley. And earned an M.A. I would come up here from Berkeley for Thanksgiving and to the reunion of the group, the commune group, Schauff's group, John Wallen's group. So, from about 1959 on, I was an occasional visitor up here. Along about 1962, Schauff said to me one day—Well, no—Schauff kept saying, "What are you going do? What are you going to do?" and I said, "Well, I'm working on an M.A. I'm working on a Ph.D." and in 1967 or 1966, he became headmaster at Catlin. So, the next time I came up, he pulled me aside and said, "Hey, any time you want a job, you let me know." Well," I said, [INAUDIBLE]. I didn't think very much about it and then about that time Char and I got together. She was an undergraduate at Brown. I went to Brown on a fellowship to the John

Carter Brown Library in 1963 and that was the year she was a freshman there. So I came—went back to Berkeley in '64 and then went back to Brown for six weeks—six months—to do some more work at the John Carter Brown in '65. I said to the kids in the Brown University Outing (?) Club, “Come out west and I’ll show you the west,” you know, “we can go hiking.” Well a whole bunch of them came out and we had a great time hiking in the Sierra Nevada. Then the next year I took a group from Brown up in the North Cascades, and Char was on that group. That was '66, and then we kinda got together that month. I had known her earlier when I’d been at Brown for that year. We were thinking about getting married. We were pretty sure we wanted to live in the northwest so I remembered what Schauff had said here in Portland. I said, “Well, you know, Schauff, what about this?” and he said, “Well, yeah, I think I’ve got an opening because one of our history teachers, her husband is going down to California next year and so we’re looking for a history teacher.” So, I went to work for Schauff and I worked for him for twelve years.

MEH: And you’re still at Catlin Gabel, aren’t you?

DC: I am still there, yeah.

MEH: Teaching—?

DC: I teach American history to juniors and Afro-American history to seniors, history of racism in the United States and South Africa to seniors, and environmental studies to seniors.

MEH: What do you see as the influence of Black Mountain on Catlin Gabel?

DC: I think that influence is mostly through Schauff, and the greatest influence I see is in something that I do with the other teachers but that I never thought I would do. Schauff was a great one for experiential education, and his idea of great education was to put a bunch of kids in a bus and go someplace. Usually they’d take a play with them, you know, but he’d find something for kids to do. Just go out and camp, you know, and learn how to live together. He was great on that and for a long time he was into the Experiment in International Living where they had these exchanges between kids. You know, between families and between kids going from one country to another. But he’s the kind of guy who would load a bunch of kids on the bus, take them all across the United States, get on an airplane, fly to Paris, and stay in France for six weeks on international exchange—or Germany, or Belgium—fly back to New York, get on the bus, and come back to Oregon, you know. I mean, he’d do these crazy things. He was always into group effort and he loved—he loved it when he could get the whole school engaged in some kind of work operation. And, by god he did. The school had a little rummage sale, and he took that thing over and persuaded some very talented moms, who didn’t have any jobs, you know, to organize it. The thing got bigger and bigger and bigger and [INAUDIBLE]. Well, it got so big that we rented a building in which to store the rummage. Then we would rent the Coliseum—the exhibition hall in the Coliseum. We would load twenty-five 40-foot trailers full of rummage in a week, and the Sunday before the sale was to open, at 2 o’clock in the morning, a truck driver would start hauling all these 40-foot trailers into Exhibition Hall. At 8 o’clock in the morning, 350 parents and students would descend onto those trucks and unload them. By 1 o’clock in the afternoon they’d be all unloaded. By 5 o’clock in the afternoon, the sale would be halfway set up.

Schauff was—I mean he had a clipboard and he would go—he'd walk up to somebody and just—He'd say, "Okay, Dave, we need that truck unloaded. Take X and Y and Z and get a couple other folks. You know what to do. It's the bicycles," you know, "or it's the refrigerators," or something like that. So, you know, you be around Schauff very long, you knew what was going on. So, we'd have that whole thing unloaded, and that was in his element. Of course, it's great for community spirit, you know. It was just tremendous. Just builds community something fierce. So he loved to do things like that, and he had to battle his faculty all the time because his faculty was becoming—was a bunch of Young Turks who were beginning to see how much fun it could be to tweak students' minds around, and so they were upping the academic ante and so—But he wanted to do this other stuff. So there was this constant tension or tug of war, which was very creative, between his desire to get the students out there doing these kinds of projects and the faculty's desire to say, "Hey kids, you guys can really do neat stuff if you just give us the time and the energy," you know. But—So as time went on, the school became more academic and less experiential, but—We always had the problem with the senior class, and if you're in high school, you know the senior classes are a problem because they're through with school. About halfway through, they're through with school. Especially once they get into college. So, they just become disengaged. So the question was how do you keep them engaged? Well we tried a whole bunch of things. We tried taking them on Outward Bound. We tried giving them senior projects and stuff like this. Nothing seemed to work and so finally Schauff said, "Why don't we put them together in some kind of community service for a week before they graduate?" So the faculty debated this, and there was a big argument, and finally the faculty bought into it. So it got—the question then was what in the hell were they going to do. Somebody came up with the idea "Let's go out in the woods and do something out in the woods, building trail or something like this." So in 1976 a teacher named Steve Saslow and a couple of other teachers, and I don't know if Schauff was along on that trip—he probably was but I don't—I'm not sure—took the entire senior class, drove 350 miles to Chelan, Washington, got on a boat, which takes four hours to get to the head of the lake, and then got on the bus which goes ten miles up the valley and dumped the kids off there. They spent three days building trail. That started our Senior Trip. Now every year we end with a senior trip which is really the same kind of thing that Schauff used to do at Black Mountain College. It's a group of people working toward a common goal for the common good. Well, that trip got firmly established in the '70s, and Schauff left the school in 1980. Before he left, he pulled me aside and he says, "That's your trip now. You're in charge of it." I'd been on two, two of the four that had already occurred, and I was with him on the last one and he was training me the last one he was on. He was training me for—It was quite obvious. He didn't have to train me, you know, all I had to do was watch. So, I took over the senior trip. Now the senior trip has evolved in a remarkable way because we've always done community service and usually it's been something outdoors. The only way you can get fifty or sixty kids into doing something is to do it outdoors, you know. You have all kinds of opportunities to build cooperation and whatnot. You try to do it indoors, and it doesn't work. So we—Every year

we'd look for a project, and the forest service would send us proposals. Well, since 1980, we have worked—we've had seventeen trips since 1980. In that time, we have done work on three national forests, two Bureau of Land Management districts, and two private service organizations. We have built trails, built fences, restored historic structures, built handicapped access. The last time I calculated, the kids had done 250 thousand dollars' worth of work and what they saved and prevented damage for is probably worth another 250 thousand. There's somewhere in the neighborhood of a half million dollars' worth of public work that's been done by those kids. In 1982, we took the senior class to the Prineville District of the Bureau of Land Management. They had a stream which had been eroding for a hundred years. They cut down the junipers, which had invaded the grasslands around the stream. We rolled the junipers into the stream for three days. We rolled thousands of juniper trees into the stream. We said, "What are we doing this for?" The BLM guy said, "We are—if we put those junipers in the bottom of the stream, they will trap the silt. This stream is running over bedrock and it doesn't run for most of the year. The reason it doesn't run for most of the year is that there's no vegetation in the stream. The reason there's no vegetation in the stream is because the cows have grazed the vegetation off the stream. There's nothing to hold the silt back. The silt runs right straight down into the river and into the Crooked River. If you guys will put these things in the streambed, it will trap the silt, vegetation will have a bed on which to grow, the silt will build up, the vegetation will build up, the roots will hold the silt in place, the water will be stored in amongst the roots and the silt, and that stream will run all year." Damned if I didn't go back there nine years later in August of a dry year, and, by god, there was cold water in there, and the silt had built up to a depth of about a foot and a half, the vegetation was springing up out of it. We brought that stream back to life. That was a bunch of kids working together, doing exactly what Schauff had done at Black Mountain College. His great goal was cooperation. That's what Black Mountain College meant to him. Cooperate together to do the job. That is what he had created in the senior trip, and that is what we have maintained in the senior trip. Now, for the last seven years, we have been working to restore eight thousand acres of severely degraded stream and forest—where it was overgrazed for a hundred years, then a forest fire, an intense forest fire swept through, then they salvage logged every stick of timber off of six thousand acres, and then they seeded it with non-native grasses, and then they turned four times as many cows onto it as they had had. They hammered that piece of ground. Six years ago when we were looking for a project, somebody said—one of their fisheries biologists said, "Hey, why don't you guys come out here and do some work on one of these streams that has been hammered, just hammered, for a hundred years." Well, we've been working on that stream for five years now, and every year our senior class goes out there and builds a fence and keeps the cows out or plants trees along the side of the stream or does some surveying work for rare grasses or thins out a timber plot to make it more natural. What we're starting to do is to expand the definition of the community to the man-land community, and every one of our seniors now graduates, having done three years of environmental—three days of environmental restoration work. That's—I look back at that and I say, "That's

Manvel Schaufler and the idea of community through work, which is an idea that he developed at Black Mountain College.” So that, to me, is the influence—and I picked that up from him. I was at Black Mountain College and I picked it up from him because I was at Black Mountain College and therefore I see that as a Black Mountain College influence.

MEH: Good. Any other thoughts on Black Mountain before I turn this off? More observations?

DC: Growing up in those hills was—I think it—It made a certain type of person a romantic. It’s probably one of the most romantic landscapes you would ever want to see. It’s almost sensual. To come of age, to become mature in that landscape—and this, I mean, it had a lot of influence on the way a person’s emotions developed. The hills of North Carolina are beautiful, and I loved those hills, as I grew up. I developed a—I developed a love for land, just land period, there. I wouldn’t have done that if I hadn’t been in those hills, and I wouldn’t have been in those hills if my father hadn’t been at Black Mountain. I could have developed that independent of Black Mountain College, but the fact was that we were at the college. You looked up the valley. There were no clear-cuts. All that had happened fifty years before, and the trees had come back. You couldn’t see Grovestone’s operations which were tearing the hell out of the place. Everywhere you’d look, the hills were clothed in trees and you had the sense of the forest primeval, which, of course, it wasn’t but aesthetically that’s the impression that it gave. So, that was important for my emotional development. I doubt it was for anybody else’s. The college—I remember the things a kid remembers, and then they have no historical relevance whatsoever. I remember clear as day beautiful Wilma von Furstenberg telling me how steady my muscles were. I—what, thirteen, pouring a five gallon, no one of those—not five-gallon, twenty-gallon, pouring milk into a glass out of a twenty-gallon jar. She said, “Wow.” That, that does for a teenager’s ego where you just—That’s totally irrelevant to anything. It’s just a memory. I got a million of those. I remember Henry Holl making a sling, and slinging stones out into Lake Eden. I can remember hailstorms. I remember beer parties. I can remember the beer when the keg was tapped, hitting the ceiling. I can remember students reeling around, making fools of themselves. I was there. I was sitting right there, you know. I was just sitting right there. I think that’s why I never took a drink. In my whole life I never took a drink, and that was because I saw people making fools of themselves when I was eleven years old. So you have—You know, it’s a funny—it’s funny what you remember. I remember football and the high school, getting off for practice, driving with the kids who lived in the orphanage. The orphanage was down near the junction with Highway 70. I got off football. We got back to the orphanage at 5:30, and I had to walk the two miles in order to get to supper—supper was at 6:15. I had to go those two miles after having played football all afternoon in order to get supper. I remember it was a cold, lonely walk up there, and it was exhilarating. I just, you know, being young in those hills, under those conditions, it was just—There were moments of pure euphoria. It was, you know, it was a place that was—it was enchanted in the imagination, at times. So it was—it was just a remarkable, remarkable place to grow up. I didn’t, I didn’t—You know, there were a lot of self-important people there, and that was always—that was a source of irritation to me. I was just a kid

and I don't know why I was irritated. If I hadn't been so irritated, maybe I'd have learned more from them, but I was a priggish moralist, and so I think I, you know, I think I missed some opportunities. I remember—I remember that the people I tended to like were ones that a lot of people dismissed. I remember there was a guy named Bill Treichler, who was a farmer from Iowa, and he'd been a tailgunner in a B-17, and he worked on the farm for a while and was a student and he had a—married a lovely girl, Martha—I can't remember—and disappeared. Never heard of him again. He was one of these people who never was famous or never made any kind of a splash. I always wondered what happened to him. A real neat guy. There was another one—Stan—god he could hit a softball. A real neat guy. All the artists thought he was a smuck because he was so ordinary. Have you ever run across Francis Foster? Ever heard of him, Faf Foster?

MEH: Yes. I haven't interviewed him.

DC: Well, he'd fill your ears. Wooo hoo hoo. He was a friend of my father's, and he's a painter. He was a very conventional painter, so he didn't have any use for the abstract people, and they didn't have any use for him. Well, he's outlived them all, become an art critic in Switzerland, no less, after living in Montreat for ages.

MEH: The last I heard he was in Idaho.

DC: Montana.

MEH: Yeah, Montana. Okay, he's left?

DC: [INAUDIBLE] Classmate of mine at Black Mountain High School, Naomi Hall, called me up once. She said [USES DEEP DRAWL], "David, do you remember Francis Foster?" and I says, "I sure do, Naomi." I started talking like them, you know. She says, "David, I never knew anything about Black Mountain College but Francis Foster, and we fought them preachers up in Montreat every time we could. Francis and I, we got to be good buddies," she says. I says, "Naomi, what happened to Francis?" and she says, "David, do you know, he's over in Switzerland now. He's making money as an art critic?" [LAUGHS] We got some of his paintings. He did paintings for my father. There's one of them out in the kitchen. I'll show it to you. There's a Black Mountain painter you're never going to see in a New York gallery, okay? [LAUGHS] But—So he's kicking around someplace. I don't know. Over in Switzerland.

MEH: How recently did you talk? Was this recently?

DC: This was three years ago, three or four years ago. So, I don't know, he may not be alive now. He was in his late twenties or early thirties. Dick Roberts, who was about the same generation, a little bit later. He married a woman named Janet Heling. She was at Black Mountain for a while and they moved to Montana and he's been—he's held various odd jobs in Montana. She became head of the Montana Head Start back in the '70s—

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]