Interviewee: MARIAN NACKE TEETER Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS

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MEH NOTE: Marian Nacke Teeter describes Robert Wunsch as a racist. Nothing

could be further than the truth. He was actively involved with integration efforts in schools and a mentor to Zora Neale Hurston.

[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

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

MNT: Well, I read about it in Louis Adamic's excerpted article in The Readers' Digest, I guess it was – excerpted from a longer work someplace else. It sounded like exactly the place I wanted to be because my family had a radical viewpoint politically and in, you know – socially. I didn't like the way – I didn't like traditional schools. So, I made an application, and I got accepted on a full scholarship, which was amazing. Which I needed.

MEH: What was your family's political position? Were they like socialists?

MNT: Yeah, they were socialists.

MEH: Communists?

MNT: No. They weren't.

MEH: Where did you live?

MNT: In Denver, Colorado.

MEH: So, Black Mountain seemed – What about the college appealed to you in particular?

MNT: Well, that it was far from home, and that it was in what looked like a very beautiful wooded area, and that it had a community feeling about it, and it was innovative in every way. [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION]

MEH: Had you ever been in the South before?

MNT: No, no.

MEH: Had you been on the East Coast before?

MNT: No, I hadn't been away from Denver, really.

MEh: So, how did you apply to Black – to the college? Do you remember?

MNT: I wrote to them and I guess – I don't know whether they even had a formal application blank. But whatever they needed, I did. And then they let me know.

MEH: How did you get there? Do you remember? The first time.

MNT: Oh, the first time, I had – Some friends paid my fare on a Pullman train, so that was a luxurious way to travel in those days.

MEH: So, you arrived at the Black Mountain train station?

MNT: Yes.

MEH: Can you remember your first impression of the college on your arrival?

MNT: Oh, that it was such a beautiful mansion – a Southern palatial, palatial place with these big white pillars, white porch in front, and everything was very exciting.

MEH: Did you have any idea what you wanted to study?

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MNT: Well, I'd always loved books, and I'd been taking piano lessons for a long time, so I was interested in music. Those were probably the two main things.

MEH: So, what courses – do you remember what courses you took the first year, to begin with?

MNT: Yeah, there was a literature course taught by Fred Mangold – a very good teacher. We read Remembrance of Things Past, and we read some Hemingway, and he also taught a creative writing class. Then I took a music class – music appreciation with John Evarts.

MEH: What was Mangold like? I don't really have any picture of him in my mind.

MNT: Well, he was rather slight, soft-spoken, and not exuberant in his manner at all, but I think he was – He had a lot of enthusiasm, basically, and he was encouraging to those of us in the creative writing class, and we had discussion groups, too. We had six or eight people in a class, and we'd sit around on the floor or on some pillows. It was so informal. We got to know each other very well and got to know the teachers very well.

MEH: What about John Rice? Was he there when you were there?

MNT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I had a class with him, of course. I don't remember whether he called it – Oh, it was in Socrates. He read parts in Greek and then he translated it. He had a beautiful, soft, mellow voice and then he had – Then he asked us lots of questions. He was trying to develop our imaginative skills. He would ask us, "What is your concept of time?" You know, some of us would have a little bit of a figure of speech to go with that word. But hearing him read in Greek was very fascinating, and then discussing that part of Plato regarding

Socrates' life and death. Oh, there was also a drama class taught by Bob Wunsch, and that was a time of very lively socially- oriented drama on the cradle – something about the cradle – Oh, dear, I can't remember the names of the plays. But they were – Then they also did some of Ibsen and some more traditional things.

MEH: Did you act in any of the plays?

MNT: I think I had some very small part in one or two. It was fun.

MEH: What about – Did you have a work program at the college then?

MNT: No. What is a work program?

MEH: I mean like working on the farm or helping at chores.

MNT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I managed not to do much of that. (LAUGHS) I think I went once with a crew to dig up potatoes, but it wasn't very much fun, and I don't think I went back. There were a few little things that I took part in, but it was pretty minor. My part was. There were some good work crews there. They did accomplish a lot.

MEH: Do you have any particular memories of – I mean what did you do for recreation at the college? Entertainment.

MNT: Well, we had – they had dances every Saturday night. People got all dressed up. The girls had long dresses, and John Evarts played jazz on the piano, and that was quite an event always. Then there were a number of occasions where we would gather around the fireplace – big, huge fireplace – and sing Bach chorales and other kinds of music together. Then they had I think it was weekly community meetings, where various topics would be discussed and various

viewpoints aired, and diverse ideas – like Albers was very different from John Rice and that became clear fairly early.

MEH: Do you remember the year that you went to the college first?

MNT: It must have been 1936, and then I left in 1939.

MEH: So you were there three years?

MNT: Three-and-a-half.

MEH: What do you think was the basis of the conflict between Albers and Rice?

MNT: Well, I think – Rice had more of an American democratic viewpoint about life in general and the exploration and the freedom to examine all kinds of things and to exchange ideas and to pursue your own route, and Albers was much more authoritarian, from a German disciplinary background. Then I think their spheres of interest were very different, too. You know, Albers was completely concerned with the artistic area, and I don't think Rice had much interest in it, or his interests were in the theoretical concepts of education and social concepts and literature, especially Greek literature, which he had specialized in as a – I think he was a Rhodes scholar.

MEH: Did you think – How did this conflict work it out in the community? Was it like an open conflict or just some (OVERTALK)

MNT: No, it was very – at the time I was there, it was quite subdued, and they were just, you know, they would express very different viewpoints in the community meetings. In the faculty meetings they might have been a more direct confrontation, I don't know. But towards the end, I think, when Rice finally left, it was a very sharp clash.

MEH: Did he leave while you were there?

MNT: Yes.

MEH: Do you have any opinion in terms of whether he should have left? Or whether it was the right thing for him to be asked to do? Or the wrong thing, or –?

MNT: Well, I guess there was no other solution to the kinds of things that had developed, and they were taken so seriously. At that moment, I think there was no other solution. But although I – If there had been – Perhaps if Albers had not been sort of a contender for the authority figure, it might have been worked out differently, and I think it would have – For me, the college would have remained in essence a liberal arts college, which was what I was interested in. I think that would have been a good solution.

MEH: Did you take music at the college?

MNT: Yes.

MEH: With whom?

MNT: Well, I studied – I had piano lessons with Allan Sly, and then John Evarts had music appreciation and music history.

MEH: What was Sly like?

MNT: He was very inhibited, I would say. Very reserved. Probably – I just really didn't feel that I got to know him much. I don't know whether others did. He used to – I remember he played the recorder, and he would go out early on Sunday morning into the woods and play the recorder. None of us heard it, but we knew about it.

MEH: Never – that's a thing I never – Oh, Sly, yes, that would make sense.

MNT: And he also knew a lot – he knew a lot of English folk dances, and he taught those to some of, to us. He was very clever, but very reserved.

MEH: Was Jalowetz there when you were there?

MNT: Jalowetz? Yes. Oh, yes. He was a delightful person. I didn't know him well, but I admired him very much, and I know his family had several family members still in Europe, having to cope with the Fascist onslaught. But I think that he was a very vigor – invigorating, fresh personality.

MEH: Did you take any classes with him?

MNT: No. I don't know that he had – conducted classes, when I was there.

MEH: What about Evarts?

MNT: Oh, he was a very delightful person. He was extremely informal and easy to get to know, and he had this wonderful talent for improvisation at the piano, imitating all kinds of composers. He also had quite a jazz background, I found out later. He was a very welcoming personality, very giving. Extremely friendly and outgoing.

MEH: If you stayed three years, were you on the route to graduation? Did you like pass the Junior Division?

MNT: I did pass the Junior Division, yes.

MEH: Were you specializing when you left? Had you chosen a major?

MNT: Yes, I was specializing in music, but I didn't know what I was doing. (LAUGHS)

MEH: Was this under Sly or Evarts that you were working? Or both?

MNT: I guess it would have been Allan Sly, you know, but there was really – It was a very unstructured kind of thing, and certainly in my area, I was – I think I should

have had a lot more structure, but – I didn't <u>want</u> it (LAUGHS) so it didn't happen.

MEH: Did you find having come from a very – we would say liberal today, or radical socialist family – how did you find the college to be politically?

MNT: It just wasn't – It had no political outlook whatsoever. It was just very detached. It was very ivory tower kind of life, you know. It was situated far away from any community, any group of people living ordinary lives, and people in college were very concerned with their own interests, and the community atmosphere was all-pervasive and all-important. So, there was almost, there was just no political viewpoint at all. There was one teacher from Cuba, a refugee from Batista.

MEH: Portell-Vilá?

MNT: Yeah. He tried to – Well he had a Current Events class, which I took, and he would have – You know, he made an attempt to incorporate some political understanding, but it wasn't – people were not receptive to it.

MEH: What about – did you become involved at all in the social issues of the area – integration, or –

MNT: Well, there weren't any. You know, what there were – I'm sure there were – but we were so isolated and had no contact with that whatsoever. I remember reading every so often in the paper a tiny little back paragraph about some Negro having been lynched somewhere. But, no, there was no interest, no concern expressed by anybody in the college.

MEH: Was there any discussion of integrating the college at that point?

MNT: Not during the time I was there. I think shortly after there were several people who tried to take steps in that direction.

MEH: Did you ever leave the college?

MNT: Yes I did! (LAUGHTER) I had an escapade. I eloped. Then I came back.

MEH: Wow! With whom?

MNT: Oh, one of the students.

MEH: David Way?

MNT: No. No, it was somebody else.

MEH: You aren't going to tell me?

MNT: His name was Neal van Middlesworth. He didn't – I don't think he came back, but Rice arranged for me to come back, which was very nice of him.

MEH: How did the college look upon this?

MNT: Oh, they were very accepting. They welcomed me back, and I wasn't in disgrace in any way. I was probably considered kind of wild and unfortunate.(LAUGHS)

MEH: How long were you away?

MNT: Oh, several months, I guess. Two or three months maybe. But I didn't – I wasn't with Neal during this time. We went to his mother's house first, and she didn't know what to do with me, so I had a friend living in New York City with whom I'd grown up in Denver, and she – Somehow my mother had arranged for her to get in touch with me, and she arranged for me to come and stay with her. So, that worked out very well, and that was, you know, that was a much better solution than anything else could have been.

MEH: So, they accepted you back. You went back to Black Mountain after that.

MNT: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: Oh, what about – Did you ever go to Roy's? It was a place downtown where, or out –

MNT: Oh, yeah, Roy's, Roy's. Oh, yeah, we went – you know – from time to time. I wasn't an habitué, but I went once in a while with some of the other people who had cars and took me along. It was quite an interesting, kind of an exciting outing. I wasn't used to going to places where you drink beer. (LAUGHS).

MEH: Did you – Do you have other memories of – any memories of the college that are particularly vivid?

MNT: Well, the friends I made who I've retained over the years, I think, were very vivid people to me, particularly Jane Mayhall and Sue, Sue Spayth her name was then. She was a very close friend. Oh, Emil Willimetz, he was a very good person. Who else?

MEH: You had your own study in the Studies Building?

MNT: Yes. Well, there was just one building, and we had – One wing was study halls and the other wings were bedrooms, which – We shared the bedrooms, but each one had his own study. Mine looked out over the – right into the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was a glorious view. I loved the out of doors there. The mountains were – Oh, one of my other friends with whom I'm still in touch was Hyalie Yamins, now Hyalie Greene. We would go out on hikes in all kinds of weather, and we both loved the out-of-doors and loved the – Spring flowers

were so tremendously luxuriant, and then falling foliage and hardwood forests. It was very exciting, beautiful countryside.

MEH: What do you think was the effect of this on the college in general?

MNT: Having that beautiful area? Oh, I think it was extremely important to – in terms of the living conditions, the way people felt about being there. It certainly was for me one of the most predominant features of the place.

MEH: What do you think was the effect of the college being as isolated as it was, away from any metropolitan area?

MNT: Well, it became very ingrown, and there were I think lots of us developed tensions just being with such a small group of people and being so concerned with our own interior psychological life. It wasn't – There were unhealthy aspects in it.

MEH: Did you take any art courses?

MNT: No, I didn't. I didn't know anything about art and I wasn't interested in any aspect, at that time.

MEH: What about – Did you work with Xanti Schawinsky at all?

MNT: Oh, he had one of these stage productions, a very far out kind of thing, and I was in one of those. (LAUGHS) All kinds of syllables that didn't have any meaning, and various abstract forms that we would have to carry in front of ourselves. Didn't have much – I didn't see much point to it, but I didn't mind being in it.

MEH: What about – Do you remember a performance he did, the <u>Dance Macabre</u>?

MNT: No, I don't remember that.

MEH: Are there other things that you remember about the college particularly? Events or anecdotes?

MNT: Oh, Bob Wunsch was – Did I mention him before? – a very fine theater director. I think he was the one that some of these socially-oriented programs on Ibsen also. He was a very fine person, and he – He idolized Rice, and he made notes of everything that Rice said, in little, little tiny microscopic handwriting. He was a very sweet person, a very good person. I remember his saying once that he – Coming from the South, as he did, he had extreme amount of bigotry towards black people, and he described what it was like for him to first sit down at a table with a black person. He said it was almost impossible. He was nauseated. But he managed to get through it, and he overcame this, so – I've thought since then what a – Probably this college could only have developed during a time where there was a general feeling of not only very great anxieties and catastrophes within our society but also good feelings of hopefulness and, you know, people taking part in things to make changes. And very great optimism.

MEH: Interesting.

MNT: I think that these were essential characteristics to have such a place come into existence and survive for as long as it did.

MEH: Were you aware of the plight of the refugees who were there?

MNT: Well, only in a vague, general way, you know. I certainly was aware of the horrors of fascism, and I guess I was concerned about what it was like for them to have to leave their homes and in some cases their family and come to a new place and try to find a way of establishing a new life and a new – Most of them

were highly-placed professional people. They were very reticent about discussing anything with most of us. I never found out much about what their lives or their feelings were. I think people wanted to shield the American young people from knowing much about this.

MEH: Did you have any real idea of how distinguished they had been in their careers in Europe? Jalowetz and Moellenhoff, and was Straus there when you were there?

MNT: Yes, he came while I was there.

MEH: Albers.

MNT: No, I don't think I appreciated their stature in Europe at all. I just knew they were, you know, they were successful professionals and that's about all I knew about them.

MEH: Did you ever go into Asheville?

MNT: Oh, yes.

MEH: What did you go in for?

MNT: Well, I don't think it happened very often. I think there were one or two concerts that a group of us went to. I think Rudolf Serkin performed there once, in the early stages of his career. You know, recitals of that sort. But it didn't happen very often.

MEH: What about – Do you have particular memories of meals at the college?

MNT: Oh, yeah, they were very enjoyable. I think we had round tables, and there were six or eight of us at a table, and students took part in serving food and clearing the dishes. Then quite often there was dancing after, after dinner, for a

little awhile. You know, good informal conversations, and teachers and students sat together, so there was a way of getting to know people in a social way. It was extremely pleasant. Then we had this wonderful staff of black people – Rubye and Jack Lipsey –, and the black young women who did the cleaning, which – The college certainly could not have survived without their labor, and I'm sure they weren't paid much. Of course, the faculty wasn't paid much either.

MEH: How did you dress?

MNT: Oh, I think mostly were – girls wore slacks and dresses too, you know. Very, very informal. Easy, easygoing kind of clothes. Nobody paid much attention except when we dressed up for these Saturday night parties.

MEH: Do you remember any visitors to the college?

MNT: Yes. I remember Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard came together. Huxley's wife, also. Huxley was almost blind then, and I remember somehow being at the same table where he and Rice were sitting and Rice was trying to make some kind of conversation, and it didn't go over very well. I don't know if he wanted to be profound, but anyway it wasn't a great success at that moment. Gerald Heard, I consider him a fascist. This was at the time of the Spanish Civil War, and I don't know if he gave a lecture or something, but it must have been some kind of formal statement in which he analyzed the Spanish Civil War as the "blood lust" of the Spanish people. I disliked him intensely. Who else came?

MEH: Were you there when Henry Miller did –

MNT: No, no. I wasn't. There were several prominent musicians.

[END OF AUDIOTAPE 1, SIDE 1, BEGINNING OF SIDE 2]

MEH: You were saying there were several musicians?

MNT: [AFFIRMATIVE]. But I can't think of their names right now. Pianists.

MEH: – who was a friend of Jalowetz?

MNT: He might have been there. I mean I may have met him at some point. I don't think he had any – I don't think he gave a performance at any time, but he may have visited some of the little classes. I'm not sure.

MEH: Are there other memories you have of the college? What about the Dreiers? Do you have –

MNT: Oh, yes. They were fine people, and I've since learned that Ted Dreier was almost the foundation for keeping it going financially. They were both very good, solid people. I think everybody liked them very much, respected them a great deal. I think Ted Dreier was one of those who was very instrumental in getting this property at Lake Eden as a permanent location

MEH: Looking back at the college now, what do you think – I mean we're doing all this recording and whatever, and somebody said, you know, "Mary, is anybody even going to be interested?" What do you think really was the importance of Black Mountain as an institution?

MNT: I don't know. (LAUGHS) I don't know whether it was important. I think it was important to almost all of us who were there, and evidently, you know, it's become quite a cult object since then, which is very amusing when I remember what a disgraceful place it was considered at the time by people in Asheville. You know, prominent and authoritative people were very fearful of it and very disapproving. Now, here the archives are located in the University of North

Carolina, and there are lots of people extremely interested in cultivating its history. I guess it would just be - For me, probably, I would think of it as one of the experimental aspects in the field of education – one of many, I would say. I don't know whether it has any far-reaching ramifications. It was such a very small and elitist kind of place. Well, I think most of us who were there recognized it as a very powerful way of having an education, of acquiring, of experiencing an education and of growing, in contrast to the way larger institutions handle things, where there's a huge amount of just things being cut and dried and very little give and take between faculty and students, or between students either, and where the focus is on developing vocational or professional skills so you can get out and earn a living. This focus was – That was not the focus at Black Mountain, but that was partly because the student body were not facing that problem. Most of them were not. So, I think Rice – After reading his book about his life, I – my admiration for him grew a very great deal, although I always did admire him a lot. But I recognize that his life was -He was an extremely – He had an enormous amount of integrity, and he went through some very horrible experiences trying to defend his right to teach in a way that was meaningful to him. I think he was extremely courageous and really a very brilliant person. I do admire him very much, and I think that if perhaps if there had been some way for him to continue at this college, and for the college itself to survive over a period of years, it could have made a very profound impression on education in general. But at this – Looking back, based

upon what, you know, its short lifetime, I don't know. I don't know what sort of – how it's appraised in general. Do you?

MEH: I don't rea – Yeah, I think that there are certain impacts it's had, just from artists that were there, later on.

MNT: Yes, yes.

MEH: I think its importance in the long run as an educational – experimental educational community has yet to really be –

MNT: Discovered.

MEH: Discovered – or defined or determined.

MNT: Well, there were certainly a huge number of prominent people in various arts who turned up there at various times, and evidently it was very meaningful t most of them.

MEH: Did you have any – After you left the college, did you go to any conventional colleges?

MNT: Oh, much longer, you know. In my forties I went back to – I took some night school classes in order to change professions, and that was a – Some of the classes were invigorating and a great time. As I got farther along and got into the more advanced areas, they became increasingly dull and stultifying and meaningless. So, it was – I've always been very happy that I was able to go to Black Mountain, which was a really invigorating and inspiring place to be.

MEH: What do you think was the effect of not having grades, not have all these rules and regulations and quality points and whatever?

MNT: Oh, I think in general it was a good – it was a good thing, because it seemed to free the students to learn at their own pace and learn in the areas they were interested in at the moment and to question a lot of things, rather than having things poured into us and memorizing, and working to meet the expectations of a teacher in some category. I liked it very much, but I think there were many of the students who were much better able to use this unstructured atmosphere than I was. I think I was very immature and I didn't make full use of it at all. But I had a wonderful time. (LAUGHTER)

MEH: Why did you leave?

MNT: Well, David and I had decided then that – This was three-and-a-half years after – I had been there three-and-a-half years. David and I were going to get married, and he had gone to New York. He was a student there also. He had left and gotten a job in New York. So, I left at the midterm to marry him and to live in New York.

MEH: This is David Way.

MNT: David Way, [AFFIRMATIVE].

MEH: What were you doing at the time? Was he working, or you working?

MNT: He was working in New York. He was one of the Bel Geddes – he was working for <u>P.M.</u>, the newspaper, <u>P.M.</u> Norman Bel Geddes was associated with them. He was working in the print shop with Norman Bel Geddes. We lived in – we shared an apartment, a brownstone house, 102nd Street, I forget, it was near Central Park, with a couple of other students – Bob Sunley and another boy

whose name I can't remember. So, that was where we lived for a while, and then we moved to various other parts of the area.

MEH: Did you have kids at the time?

MNT: No. Although my first son was born in New York City. But not, not in this locality.

MEH: But this was David Way's son?

MNT: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: And were you working? You weren't working at the time?

MNT: No. I wasn't.

MEH: So, how long did you stay in New York?

MNT: Well, I think we lived there about a year-and-a-half. Well, we lived in New Jersey briefly also. He worked for a newspaper in New Jersey. Maybe we were – Yeah, we were in New York probably a total of three years – or in that area, you know. Then we came to – His father was working – By that time the War – America, the U.S., was in the War. Yeah, Pearl Harbor had occurred, in New York – we were in New York at the time of Pearl Harbor. David's father was working at Idaho and suggested that we move there so we did, and David worked with him in a construction job. Then his parents and he and I came to Los Angeles, and we then lived here.

MEH: And this is where your son was born?

MNT: No, my son – my older son was born in New York City.

MEH: And so you moved here and his parents moved here.

MNT: Yeah.

MEH: And you were a mother – Had you gone back to school at this time?

MNT: No. Oh, no, no, no. Not until much, much later. No, then – David and I divorced and several years I remarried and had a second son and worked in an office for many, many years, and then sometime when I was in my forties, I started going to night school to get a degree, and so I kept on with that for a long time, and continued to work also.

MEH: What were you studying?

MNT: Well, like – (LAUGHS). It was a common choice. Maybe it still is. Psychology.

MEH: Did you get the degree?

MNT: I got a degree in it as a school psychologist. I found – I learned that the only way you could have any kind of profession in psychology proper would be to become a Ph.D., which I could not undertake. So, this school psychology required a Master's, which I finally got, and then I worked at that – that field for a short time. But it didn't last very long, because Reagan was the governor here and he wrecked the educational system. The cutbacks financially were ruinous to all the fringe areas of education, so I had – I didn't have a job for very long. I worked in the office again, and so – I've had a lot of variety, I would say.

MEH: What did you husband do? Your second husband.

MNT: My second husband. He was a carpenter.

MEH: Looking back, what do you think has been the impact of Black Mountain on your life?

MNT: Well, it's been – it certainly has enriched it very much. My enthusiasm and my knowledge of literature and music were very well grounded by that experience, and it continued to, you know, expand, I would say, and given me an enormous

pleasure which I still have. Probably a wider view of humanity and culture in general and life in general, philosophically and socially and politically, than I would have had otherwise. It was a very very powerful, fascinating experience.

MEH: After you left, your brother went to the college.

MNT: Yes. Well, he was there at the time I was too.

MEH: Oh, did you overlap?

MNT: Yes.

MEH: This was your younger brother?

MNT: Yeah. I can't talk about him!

MEH: Okay. I'm sorry. Okay. So, you've lived in L.A. all these years.

MNT: (LAUGHS) Right.

[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]