

Interviewee: CLAUDE STOLLER  
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

**MEH:** [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. [LONG CONVERSATION WITH ROSEMARY STOLLER ABOUT GARDENS, ETC. DID NOT REALIZE CAMCORDER WAS ON. COMMENTS ABOUT SETUP NOT TRANSCRIBED.] How did you come to be at the college, Claude?

**CS:** Well, my brother had studied architecture at NYU. I got interested in what I thought was industrial design. Because of that and through my brother I'd heard about the Bauhaus and thought what a wonderful place. But that, of course, was not possible to think about. There was what was called "The New Bauhaus Exhibit" at Rockefeller Center every year. So, I went to that. There were two schools represented. One was at that time called The New Bauhaus in Chicago – that was Moholy-Nagy's school – and the other was Black Mountain College. Well, Black Mountain College had a kind of a scholarship system. They called it a sliding scale of tuition. I at that time was going to CCNY. I had been at CCNY for one semester. I knew I wanted to go into some more visual kind of field so I applied to Cooper Union. I took the exam and was accepted. But I had also written to Black Mountain, and surprisingly I got a nice answer from Black Mountain. So, I applied and was interviewed by Xanti Schawinsky. We met in

New York, and he took me to a restaurant overlooking the Hudson River on the Palisades. He was a charming guy, and it was wonderful. It sounded so incredible and so that was it. I decided not to go to Cooper Union but to go to Black Mountain for which I was never sorry. (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** You were living in New York? You're from New York?

**CS:** Yes. I was living in New York with my parents in the Bronx. My brother had started his photography career. He had graduated from architecture school. So I went to Black Mountain. It was interesting that Albers was appointed my faculty adviser, and I met with Albers. I remember very vividly meeting with him, sitting in rocking chairs on the porch of Robert E. Lee Hall, looking across the valley, and Albers sort of talking to me – very warm and friendly. He made quite an impression on me, and I really believe we became good friends as well as having a teacher-student relationship. So that was nice.

**MEH:** Do you remember how you physically got to Black Mountain that first trip? Did you drive?

**CS:** Oh, no. I took a train to Washington and had to change trains to the Southern Railroad to get to Asheville. It was the greatest shock because I'd never experienced segregation before. In Washington, D.C. they changed us. They made the darker ones moved to the back. I don't remember whether I had to change trains in Asheville, but I did get to the Black Mountain station and was met there by somebody from the college. I can't remember whom. Maybe Ted. It was quite an adventure.

**MEH:** Yeah, for a kid. The college was at Lee Hall when you were first there?

**CS:** Yes, for my first two years at Black Mountain, the college was at Lee Hall. I had a study and shared a bedroom at Lee Hall. I don't remember at what point the property was purchased at Lake Eden, but I think probably in my second year. We started the work program, started to fix up the Lake Eden buildings to move the college. So that my first two years were at Lee Hall and the second two years were at Lake Eden.

**MEH:** How do you remember Lee Hall as a building?

**CS:** Oh, it was wonderful. I've been back in recent years and I may even have some photos. It's a great rambling wooden building, probably built with green wood. Or at least Albers and I talked about that, so that it sagged in lots of places and the corridors went up and down. It was divided up into little rooms. It was a summer YMCA retreat, and it was really perfect for us because we could have little studies and bedrooms. It had large common bathrooms and a big lobby downstairs where we had our dances and concerts and lectures. Out in the back of Lee Hall was a dining hall. It was up the hill a little bit. That was where we had our meals and where we did our theater. We had a portable stage which we put up for the theater. Meals were a terribly important thing in our lives, because it was a time when we all came together on a very informal basis. Lee Hall housed all of us, faculty and students. I guess the faculty tended to be in one wing and the students tended to be in another. Well, we remembered it as, I think, a kind of a magical place – these long, long corridors with various people off the corridors. You could go down the corridor and knock on doors and get into people's little worlds. We were very young and we didn't

think it was uncomfortable, I suppose. At my age now I might think it was uncomfortable. The college had put its own heating system in there. It seems now incredibly ambitious to take a building like that and put pipes and radiators and a furnace and so on in to it. But it was done. There were frequently emergencies of one sort or another. Something was breaking down. But it was a kind of magical place perched up there on the mountain with a beautiful view. The buildings in front of it hadn't been built in those days, so it really was a sweeping view down the valley.

**MEH:** What do you think was the effect on the college of being housed all in this one, mostly in this one building?

**CS:** Well, I think it certainly reinforced the notion that we were a community. We happened to be a college, but we were a community. I think that was very important to us. In the move to Lake Eden, when we realized that we would be separated – faculty would be in cottages and so on – when I think of it now, I wonder that it didn't have a greater effect on splitting up the community. But it didn't. It seemed to me we were still pretty close. Lee Hall also had classrooms. I remember the physics and biology labs were in the basement, and Albers taught drawing class in the lobby and on the porch when the weather was good. It was a building of many functions, housing and other things.

**MEH:** Albers was your advisor. So, you started immediately with his classes?

**CS:** Yes. I started with his classes. But he advised me about science and mathematics as well, and other courses. He tended not to be very strong about things like philosophy and sociology and so on. I started with Albers' classes

but I started taking physics and math and biology, I remember. Other things as well. He was always, for me, available to discuss what was going on. I remember his classes very vividly, but it's interesting to me how other courses were important to me, too. One of the things that was important about being such a small community is that your friends in other fields who were having very strong experiences in their classes and in their interests made this known to you. So, Lucian Marquis was a good friend of mine, and, of course, I didn't know anything about sociology and philosophy except through Lucian. My roommate, actually in my later years, was Jerry Wolpert, who was Sue Riley's first husband. He was a philosopher and a sociologist. It was very important to me because somehow in my coursework I was not getting these things, but I was getting exposures to these things from my friends. That's awfully important in a small academic community. It's amazing that Black Mountain attracted the scientists it did. I mean Peter Bergmann, whom I just saw a couple of years ago down at the reunion, and other scientists were really topnotch people. They came to Black Mountain, even without all the elaborate laboratory facilities and sort of managed to do their work. Certainly managed to teach very well.

**MEH:** How do you remember Albers as a teacher? What was he like?

**CS:** Well, he was the most stimulating teacher you can imagine. I think he thought of himself that way, as a stimulating teacher. He would get into such a high pitch of excitement about something that we were doing or about something that you were doing that sometimes words escaped him. He would make up words because he couldn't think of the English word. He was such a creative

character that he made up wonderful words and wonderful expressions. But it mattered a great deal to him, obviously, what he was teaching, and it mattered a great deal to him that you should react and be stimulated. The most important thing was he wanted to open our eyes. He wanted us to be able to see what we'd been looking at all our lives but hadn't been seeing. I think, of all of his lessons, of all of his aims as a teacher, this was the main one. His great belief was that once we could see, then the rest would follow. I think that one of the very important lessons of his was that we as students were not producing art, although we were taking courses in drawing and color. He never called them "art" classes. He called them Color, Drawing, Werklehre, which was a kind of a craft studies. I don't know how you would translate that. But he never called them "art," and he never wanted us to think that what we produced in his classes was art. They were studies. I think I may have told you before that his greatest approbation that you could get was – if he liked something that you had done or he felt it was really good work, he would say, "Ja, boy, that's a good beginning!" He just said, "That's a good beginning." (LAUGHS) It was wonderful. If we made a drawing on a sheet of paper and he said it was a good beginning and we were proud of it, we wanted to put the date on it and put it away. "No, no, no," he would say. "There's more room here. Turn it over. You can draw something here." In other words, it was not being treated as a work of art but as studies. That's wonderful. The result is I don't have any of them (LAUGHS). But I do carry them in my head. He was an incredible teacher and a very warm person. I always appreciated that. When I went into the army I had

very nice letters from him. It was very touching. Anni was a little more formal, I would say. She was also very friendly but a little more formal, and (LAUGHS) not given to the kind of bubbling enthusiasm that Albers had.

**MEH:** Did you take weaving with Anni Albers?

**CS:** Yes, I did. One semester. She was a great taskmaster – very, very disciplined. A wonderful person. Very sensitive. Her color sensitivity was just marvelous. I think she had a kind of a modest, sort of self-deprecating manner, but she was very strong and a real taskmaster. You had to do it the way that she knew was right.

**MEH:** How did she go about teaching beginning weaving? Do you recall?

**CS:** Well, she started on a very sort of a theoretical basis. I remember that there were diagrams on graph paper, very carefully explaining the different kinds of weaves and the different variations. I remember thinking how terribly complicated it was. I think she wanted us to master it, to know it as a craft, as a discipline. She was very disciplined, and although you could do whatever you liked, there was a basic discipline which you had to understand and go through. I've never become a weaver, but I think I can understand what weavers do and understand what the craft is like – from Anni.

**MEH:** How did Albers – First, going back to Anni. Where were the looms? You had looms at that point?

**CS:** Yes, yes.

**MEH:** Where were they set up at Lee Hall?

**CS:** They were in the basement. They were in – let's see – in one of the wings of Lee Hall, down in the basement. There were several looms. I think I have photos of some of them. Some of them quite complicated. They had multiple heddles so that you could really do pretty complex things with them. We didn't have a lot of equipment. The classes were small, and there were relatively few weavers. I think there were enough looms. I don't remember there being a problem.

**MEH:** How did Albers teach drawing?

**CS:** Well, as a great discipline. Drawing was not art. It was the discipline of seeing and training your hand to do what the eye could see. His own work was abstract, but there was no hint of that in his teaching. When Albers would draw something as a demonstration, I realized that he could draw like an Old Master. He could draw very well. He chose in his work not to do that, but he could. For him, that was the basic thing: that you had to learn to see, and then once you could see, it was a question of getting your hand to do it. But seeing was the most important thing. He would give us exercises. I remember, for instance, we would draw teacups, and as we drew them he would explain the basis of the geometry of a teacup. I mean, how you could actually construct it from what you could see. If you could see it, then you could construct it. You knew what some of the principles were. You knew that the handle radiated out from the center. If you drew it in such a way that the handle didn't radiate out from the center, well that was something that could be corrected. You could show it, and you would be encouraged to make a certain diagram of the axes and the radii



and so on. I remember he was interested really in perspective. If you were drawing a cylinder, the ellipse at the top and the ellipse at the bottom were not congruent. The ellipse at the bottom was fatter than the ellipse at the top because you were seeing this one more foreshortened. This kind of thing, just hour after hour kind of emphasis. I wouldn't say "beating it into our heads" – but emphasizing it and showing it. It made quite an impression. That's what drawing was about. Then we would draw figures and so on, and again it was a question of seeing. He would sometimes make analogies, "Well, you see that, that shape. That really looks like a face. Or that looks like a dog's ear." Anything to get you going. He had a thing which he called "physiognomical seeing."  
[REPEATS IN GERMAN ACCENT]. It was the thing of seeing faces in forms. If you look at clouds, you could understand the shape of a cloud better if you likened it to a face. He would somehow do anything, anything to get you to kind of understand a shape. Sometimes we were drawing, and if you just couldn't get the shape in the correct foreshortening or something, Albers would say, "All right," and he would bring out a device which he called "the Dürer frame." It was a sheet of glass mounted on a little stand. He'd set that in front of you, and you would look at the object you were drawing through that. He would give you a fountain pen, and you would draw it on the glass. You could see how – what the foreshortened shape really was like. I think Dürer was interested in things like that, and Albers was very interested in Dürer because of his disciplined way of looking at drawing and perspective. Those classes were very strong. Sometimes it would be almost like an appeal, an argument. He really was

trying, trying to get us to sort of react to something. I remember one thing, as an antidote. There were certain things that I remember that he said one tends to do as a beginner in drawing, as a beginner. He would say, "All right, you just can't seem to get that ellipse distorted enough to go into the corner correctly." He'd say, "Now do it wrong in the right direction. Make it go way into the corner," and you know – that's in the right direction for you, but wrong. So, you would do it that way awhile and then you would break down this inhibition about getting it – Where these methods of teaching came from I don't know. I think he just had it in his bones. He was that kind of a teacher.

[END OF AUDIOCASSETTE 1, SIDE 1. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2]

**CS:** Those classes are very much in my mind. As a matter of fact, I remember trying one of Albers' tricks with my students. I wasn't teaching drawing, particularly, but my notion about teaching the architects to draw was that drawing for them was not art but it was a means of study. You couldn't look up a word in the dictionary unless you could spell. I mean you had to learn to spell. Drawing was like spelling. So drawing as a means of study was a way of finding out if things would work, if things could work. If you're designing a building, you have to know if your ideas are going to work. Nowadays I suppose with computers it is said that you can work it out with a computer. But drawing was a means of study for us. I remember trying one or another of Albers' tricks with the students. For instance, I would meet my students in a room and we'd meet there every morning. I'd say "Okay, you've been coming through that door for weeks now. I want you to draw a picture of the doorway from the outside – with

everything, frame and sign and if there are pipes there, light switches, everything. Everything that's there." So, they started to go to the door. I said "No, no. I want you to do it from memory." So they'd take a sheet of paper – I asked them to take a sheet of paper and draw the door from memory. I asked them to put the date on it and their name and give it to me. Then I just put them aside, and a few weeks later I would say, "Okay, now you've been coming through that door for weeks, and I'd like you to take out a piece of paper and draw – " "Oh we've already done that," they said. I said, "Oh, that's wonderful. You'll do it very well now." The interesting thing was to compare the second time with the first time. That was a real Albers trick, and of course it was very revealing. Albers had an expression. He would say, "That's not self-expression. That's self-revelation." (LAUGHS) Where he got these things, I don't know, but he had a gift with words. So, that was that kind of self-revelation. You can demonstrate how to draw a pair of scissors. Of course Albers showed us that once, in a class, and I did it with my students – just from basic principles. You organize just the things you know. You put the things you know down on paper. Then the pair of scissors comes and it works perfectly. But if you ask them to draw a pair of scissors, just from memory, they won't work. I mean there are various reasons why the thing as a device won't, but if you draw it from the point of view of a working device and make sure that all the working elements are there, it'll work perfectly. So I thought that was very important for architects and thought that was very important for all of us (LAUGHTER).

**MEH:** Did you draw from a model in drawing class?

**CS:** Sometimes, yes. Sometimes we drew one another clothed. I think there were some people at Lee Hall who had nude life drawing classes, but I think that was not of particular interest to Albers. It may have been. We did not do life drawing in his classes, except as I say drawing of other students in the class. Albers would – in the course of the day if you would meet him -- he would be very excited about something, some light pattern reflected on a wall or some reflected color on a ceiling or something like that, and he would be sure to grab you and point it out to you because it was exciting. I mean it was exciting. Life was an exciting visual experience for him and he wanted it to be that for us too.

**MEH:** What do you remember about his color class?

**CS:** Well, he started also on a very theoretical basis – various color charts, color systems, Goethe and I don't remember names of some of the others. Let me say it was a very sort of technical, experimental approach to color. Again, it wasn't art. If we made, as we were assigned to do, plates, using different colors, we were not encouraged to think of them as paintings, anyway, and they certainly had nothing to do with his work. He never showed us his work. He never showed us his work at all. If you wanted to see his work, you could go visit him but never in class. His work was never an example. So it was very sort of a kind of a technical analytical approach to color. You were concerned with the color of light coming in, and you were concerned about colors, the interactions of colors with one another, and so on. Of course, you were encouraged to see color everywhere, so that it was never a question of learning a medium like watercolor. We did use tempera, poster colors and so on, but it

was never a question of learning a medium as such. It was always a question of color. Lots of colored paper cut-outs and torn pieces of color out of magazines. In the North Carolina fall, of course, there was a riot of color and we had a marvelous time. I remember Dick Carpenter, who was a biology teacher, one time was working on a way of dissolving the brilliant colors out of the leaves, and Albers was very excited about that. (LAUGHS). Of the three courses – drawing, color, and Werklehre – Werklehre was the most, how should I say it? In a way it was the most abstract course. You couldn't think of it as a skill that you were learning. You weren't learning a drawing skill. You weren't learning a skill in manipulating color. Now you were talking about what he called *matière*, materials and their relationship to one another. In Werklehre there were two things. One was *matière* and the other was some kind of a sort of exploration of the nature of materials, sheet materials – paper, wire, and so on, and wood – solid wood – where we actually made experiments in these different materials. I think that was probably more from the foundation course at the Bauhaus. I think that's – because I've seen in the old Bauhaus records -- some of the same things that he did. You know, Ruthie Asawa is very interested in the paper folding and the wire stuff, which came out of that as well. Werklehre was an ever-changing course. You could take it several times and other people in the community came to Werklehre classes, also, because it was so – it was [intransient. (interesting) (?)]

**MEH:** I was going to ask you if you were there, say, three years, did you just take Albers' courses over and over, or did he have like Werklehre I, Werklehre II, Werklehre III?

**CS:** Well, I don't think it was Werklehre I, II, and III. It was just Werklehre and you could take it – I'm sure I took it two or three times. But you had other things to do. I mean, if you wanted to get into the Senior Division and eventually graduate, you had to spread out and take some other courses. You didn't have endless time, and, of course, there was the Work Program, which was instead of an athletic program, I think. There were other kinds of activities, other kinds of interests that people pursued. I was interested in photography and was very much encouraged by Albers. I think he'd rather have seen me become a photographer than an architect.

**MEH:** Did you have a darkroom at the college?

**CS:** Yeah.

**MEH:** A camera?

**CS:** Well, I had my own. I had a big old press camera that I'd borrowed from Ezra, and I had a view camera of my own. There were some people around that had cameras. Fred Stone – Actually I got Freddie into the darkroom, and he got a camera and he started working in the darkroom. Albers was always interested, terribly interested in photography. We had projectors and he was always interested in trying new things, fooling around, crumpling up cellophane and putting it in the projector to see what would happen. You know, always pushing us to try things. This was outside of class. This had nothing to do with

Werklehre. Albers would stop around the darkroom to see what I was doing. I was doing photograms or something, and he would sort of encourage that, push on that. So – yes, one could take the class as many times. I think that painters tended to take Color over and over again.

**MEH:** Did you do any actual painting at the college?

**CS:** I didn't paint, no. I was, as I said, interested in photography. There were very serious painters, as you know, painting – some of whom didn't get along with Albers because Albers was very strict about his ideas. I remember Bob De Niro didn't get along with Albers, and Dick Andrews didn't get along with Albers, and so on. But they were painting actively at the time they were there. Jane Slater (Marquis). I don't remember that she was painting but she was always very busy I think doing things in Albers' classes.

**MEH:** What were some other...?

**CS:** Oh, I was also working in the workshop, making stuff like furniture and –

**MEH:** Woodworking shop?

**CS:** Woodworking shop, yes.

**MEH:** Was anyone teaching or just worked with the equipment there?

**CS:** Yeah, we did. We didn't have a regular teacher. There was a cabinetmaker at Black Mountain.

**MEH:** Edward Dupuy?

**CS:** Yes. Did you know Ed? Ed was a cabinetmaker. I think he made coffins and tables and made whatever cabinetmakers do. Ed used to come up and he got the shop organized and taught us how to sharpen tools and how to run the

lathe and so on. I think I have a photo of Eva working at the drill press in the shop and maybe somebody turning on the lathe. Anyway, so that was fine and Albers liked him a lot. Albers was always very interested in wood, and he liked Ed Dupuy because Ed was a self-taught cabinetmaker. He really knew about wood and tools and it was interesting that he and Albers out of totally, totally different cultures sort of came together and I think understood each other. Is Ed still around?

**MEH:** No, he died.

**CS:** Then, of course, there were Work Program people – Charlie Godfrey and his group.

**MEH:** I'm sure we'll have a lot to talk about the building of the Studies Building, so let's go back to Lee Hall for a while. If you need a break, let me know. Lee Hall, you took a general curriculum, not just art.

**CS:** That's correct.

**MEH:** What are some other classes that you took those first two years?

**CS:** Well I, I took physics –

**MEH:** With?

**CS:** With Lindsley. The first time I took it, it wasn't going well. I think I needed some more math or something. So I talked to Lindsley and he agreed that I would drop the class. So I dropped the class, but I used to keep coming to the class. Although I was not enrolled anymore. I think Charles kind of liked the idea (LAUGHS, UNINTEL). Then I took physics again later with Peter Bergmann. Let's see, I'm trying to think – I was taking I think biology with Dick Carpenter at



that time, and I don't remember, I think I started calculus with Ted Dreier. I took French literature but I'm not sure – I think that was later. Yes. I think that was later. So, at Lee Hall, I was taking drawing, and Werklehre, and physics. I think that was about all I was doing. I think I took weaving there as well, probably in my second year, with Anni. There were many people coming to visit from the outside. Clifford Odets came at that time. Henry Miller came, and so on. So there would always be something going on, some talks or some discussions, so that your education was by no means limited to your formal classes. Although formal classes were formal classes: you showed up and you did your work.

**MEH:** I was going to ask you, you know, did you really without the pressure of grades, you know recorded grades and all of that stuff, did students really take their work seriously at the college?

**CS:** Oh, yes. We knew we weren't getting grades but the college took the responsibility of telling your parents what was going on. Your parents got letters from the various teachers for that purpose. But I think you didn't need that kind of push. Being in the community, being among people who really cared, and being in a small group is stimulus enough. I mean you didn't need to be pushed. Now that I think of it, in the first years many students found that the freedom was so exhilarating, they frequently didn't go to classes. I think for some people it was a transition that took some time to get into this new mode of being responsible for themselves, and not being responsible to a grading system. It's interesting. I just remembered that that was a thing. The countryside and the place was certainly very seductive, to go for walks in the

woods and all kinds of things. I started playing the flute. I started playing the recorder. I don't know why. John Stix had one. No, it wasn't at Lee Hall. I guess that was later. But, you know, you couldn't help but be aware of what everybody else was interested in, and you sometimes would succumb to one of those interests yourself which is very exciting.

**MEH:** What do you remember about Dick Carpenter?

**CS:** I remember him as being rather sickly, for some reason. He was a quiet man, very, very interested in his field, and I think very methodical. I mean, using just the most rudimentary materials, he set up a biology lab, and we started to look around us and study things in the environment. I think Dick was very much influenced by the Black Mountain aura, and I think it opened his eyes as well. I somehow – I don't know. I guess I didn't know him very well. I never knew very much about his background. But I did like him as a teacher. I think he was a fine biology teacher. You probably know – I'm sure you know a great deal more about him than I do.

**MEH:** I know just a little bit about his background, but not really that much of a picture of a person. He's done some interesting work in publishing in the field of ecology, which was very far advanced for –

**CS:** I didn't know that. I didn't know really anything about his work. I guess one thing that interested me greatly is he bought an old car in Detroit to drive to Black Mountain, and it cost eleven dollars. I'll never forget that! (LAUGHS) He drove it to Black Mountain.

**MEH:** Did you participate at all in the drama activities?

**CS:** Dramatic. Oh yes, I – for some reason I was assistant stage manager when we did Macbeth. Yeah, with Lisa Aronson and George Randall. George was the stage manager. Do you know George Randall? Is he still around? What happened to George? But anyway – Yeah, I loved it. I mean I loved it because, you know, there was lighting and there was building stuff. I loved to build stuff. I made all the spears and the torches for Macbeth. I did like it. I guess I had been in a dramatic group one summer, and I think had two lines in Macbeth (LAUGHS), but I was sort of active in the stage productions. We traveled. I remember we took Macbeth to Lenoir, North Carolina and performed it in a high school.

**MEH:** Do you remember what you made the spears and props out of for Macbeth?

**CS:** Oh, wood. George had designed the set. It was done like a Greek tragedy and there were great ramps going up onto the stage. Emil was one of the soldiers, Emil Willimetz. George insisted that Emil couldn't wear his glasses, but he couldn't see very well without his glasses. So he fell off the ramp and broke his spear (LAUGHS), and I remember Emil trying to hold the spear together, going off in two directions. But it was great fun. Sue Riley was Lady Macbeth and John Stix was Macbeth. I have a photo of him somewhere, I think. No, I don't have a photo of John, but of Bernard Malek. But anyway – Yeah, I liked the dramatic thing a lot, mostly because of building.

**MEH:** What was Wunsch like as a teacher and director?

**CS:** Bob? He was a charming guy – very friendly. I didn't know enough about drama to know whether he was a good director or not a good director. But he was

certainly very well-organized. What he was like? I think that he had a sort of a literary sense. I mean I think he was, as a director, as a theater person, he was more literary than visual – probably, I would think, although he had enormous respect for the visual people, for Albers. I think Bob used to come occasionally to the Werklehre classes. He was also very dedicated, very, very hardworking, and very likeable. I think, at the same time as he was directing plays and teaching classes, he was also Rector of the college and so he was very busy with all sorts of stuff. Somehow he was always available. You could always find Bob to talk with. A very wonderful guy.

**MEH:** Did you ever go with him to Chapel Hill to take any productions there?

**CS:** No, not to Chapel Hill, but I remember going out to the coast to a – on the keys off the North Carolina coast – what is that, to the –

**MEH:** The Lost Colony production?

**CS:** Yes, the Lost Colony production. I think a bunch of us piled into Bob's car and went to that. I think there may have been more than one car. I can't remember. At least during the time I was there we never went to Chapel Hill. But Bob and others may have gone. He talked a lot about Green who had been a colleague of his I guess.

**MEH:** While you were at Lee Hall, are there visitors that you remember in particular? You had mentioned Odets.

**CS:** Yeah, Clifford Odets came with his buddy – I can't remember his name – who was it? He always edited the short stories of the year. Do you know who that is?

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

**CS:** I can't remember his name. Anyway, and he and Odets were very pleasant. They were sort of heavy drinkers, as I remember (LAUGHS) and they spoke and they interacted with people at the college. Henry Miller was very quiet, and I thought he was some kind of businessman (LAUGHS). It's very funny. I don't think he was there very long. I think he was there very briefly, and he mostly spent his time with the history teacher, I can't remember his name.

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

**CS:** He was an older man at that time, and he had a grown daughter whom he named after the muse of history. Anyway, Henry Miller spent time with him. I remember Carlos Merida came from Mexico, the painter, and I do have a picture of him.

**[END OF SIDE 2, AUDIOCASSETTE 1.**

**BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, AUDIOCASSETTE 2]**

**CS:** It's coming down! Look at it! Unbelievable.

**MEH:** What do you think was the effect at the college of having visitors coming through?

**CS:** Yes.

**MEH:** What do you recall about his visit?

**CS:** Well, the Albers had met Merida in Mexico and admired him as a painter. They invited him to come visit Black Mountain, and he came to visit us at Lee Hall. What I remember of him is that he didn't speak a word of English, and Albers didn't speak a word of Spanish. The two of them were great pals, and the way

they communicated is they would sit next to each other with a pad of paper and draw on the pad and pass the pad back and forth. I remember them going off into gales of laughter, just having a wonderful time together. Somehow they could communicate very well and that was very nice. I don't remember much else about him. Obviously I couldn't speak to him. But I remember that the Albers were very fond of him and he obviously of them.

**CS:** Well, it was such a small community that any visitor to anybody in the community was a visitor to all of us. I mean we were all aware and conscious of visitors. I think it was felicitous. It was great. It was very exciting. One of the things that it did was reinforce our own notions about the community because the visitors would always react so strongly, so favorably, that (LAUGHS) it made us feel very positive about the community. But it was interesting. I remember visitors who came and either performed music or who lectured. We would all turn out for these things, and so they tended to be something that we all talked about, we had all experienced together. That was just another wonderful thing about a tiny college community.

**MEH:** At the time, do you think, do you recall how you thought of yourselves at the time? Did you think that you were in an unusual place, an unusual college? Did you think you were special in any way?

**CS:** Yes, I think we thought somehow we were pioneering. We were aware that because there were no grades, and there was no degree, that we were doing something unusual and in a certain sense taking a risk. I think most of us believed in it very strongly and thought, if it was a risk, it was a risk worth

taking. We had no way of measuring ourselves against other academic institutions except the graduation system. Whenever somebody graduated and examiners came from another college and so on, it reinforced our own predilections about how strong we were. So, yeah, I think we did think we were special, and we were... I was very much aware of certain articles that had been written about Black Mountain and mentions of it that had been made in the press. Yeah, I think we felt we were (LAUGHS) special. Maybe we were rather conceited. I don't know. Then, of course, within the community itself, it isn't as if we were free of the kinds of, oh, sort of snobbish prejudices that one has at a small community. I mean, there were people who we thought were somehow not as bright or not as important or whatever as other people. I guess that's a fairly common thing. I just remembered that guy's name.

**MEH:** Go ahead and tell me, and then we'll –

**CS:** His name is Bernard Malek.

**MEH:** Right. Oh, did you leave either Lake Eden or Lee Hall often to go into the surrounding community, like Asheville or Black Mountain?

**CS:** Rarely. Of course, one of the reasons was that we were not mobile. I mean some of the faculty had cars and Jimmy Jamison had a car. But most of us did not have cars. I don't remember that we had a lot of interest – at least I don't think that I had a lot of interest in going into Asheville. We would go to – what was the place down the road called?

**MEH:** Roy's. [MEH: In the thirties, the students went to Roy's which was near the railway station. Later they went to Peek's Tavern (Ma Peek's).]

**CS:** Roy's. We would go to Roy's sometimes on a Saturday night. We'd all pile into somebody's car. But, no, we didn't leave the community very much. Sometimes square dancing. I remember square dancing on the street in Black Mountain with the locals.

**MEH:** When you were going to Roy's, was it downtown by the train station, or was it outside the city limits?

**CS:** It seemed down the road. I don't think it existed when Bob Bliss and I set out to find it (LAUGHS) two years ago. Nobody had heard of it. I think the town sort of grew up to encompass it. It isn't there anymore.

**MEH:** Do you remember Roy himself?

**CS:** No. I don't. There must have been a person called Roy. I don't remember anybody like that. I don't think I went very often. We went once in a while. It was a great treat to go to Roy's and drink beer.

**MEH:** I'm going to put this photo on and I'll want you to tell me – [INSTRUCTIONS NOT TRANSCRIBED].

**CS:** I like the idea of something delicious that isn't bad for you, you know.

**MEH:** [GUSTATORY REMARKS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

**CS:** I learned how to handle an ax which, of course, I'd never done before. You want to talk about the cave.

**MEH:** We were talking about the cave. Now the photo we just showed that was you on the left and Fred Stone in the middle and Swackhamer on one side and I was on the other?



**CS:** It was – Yeah. Freddie was in the middle and Swack on one side and I was on the other. Fred Stone had spent a summer near Nashville, and for some reason or other he knew about some caves in the hills and was fascinated with exploring them. He talked us into going with him. He had a car. We drove with him to Nashville, near Nashville, and went down in this cave. We had ropes and flashlights, and I think we were very foolhardy to try it. But we did it. It was really very interesting and exciting and a little frightening. What was the most exciting thing is that we managed to climb back up the slippery ropes and got out. That picture is the three of us standing there, very proud of ourselves indeed. I don't know who took the picture. Maybe Jane or Nan.

**MEH:** They didn't go down in the cave?

**CS:** Oh, no. (LAUGHS) Jane was there and Nan was there and Freddie and Swack and myself.

**MEH:** So what was the Gashouse Gang?

**CS:** The Gashouse Gang was a group of people, mostly students of Straus, who were interested in the social sciences, although some of the artists who were kind of opposed to Albers, or not in the Albers faction, were part of it. They would get together – reserve tables for themselves in the Dining Room, usually one table or maybe two, at which they would very loudly criticize the community or make lots of jokes together, laugh very loudly and so on. My roommate, Jerry Wolpert, was a prominent member of the Gashouse Gang, as well as, oh, Jack Roberts, I remember I think Dick Andrews was in it. There were several people – as I say, artists as well as social science people. It was considered to be a

very unfriendly thing by the rest of the community. Somehow I would get roped into it occasionally. It wasn't characteristic of me because I was generally with the Albers' crowd, but I would get roped into it. So, I was in a funny situation, somewhere halfway between the Gashouse Gang and the Albers people.

Lucian was definitely with the Gashouse Gang. I'm sure he talks about that. But it was fun. It also was disturbing that there were rivalries, animosities, misunderstandings, you know, in the community. That there was some kind of turbulence. I remember that when I was talking to Charles Eames in Los Angeles, who was thinking of sending Lucia, his daughter, to Black Mountain. He asked me about it and I said that I didn't think it was a good idea. I wasn't sure, because there was so much turbulence in the community. "Well," Eames said, "that sounded just fine!" he said (UNINTEL). (LAUGHTER) I obviously didn't think about it that way at that time.

**MEH:** What were the issues when you were there? What did people disagree about?

**CS:** It's interesting. I'm trying to think. I know that to a certain extent it had to do with the kinds of books people were reading and what they were interested in. I think the Gashouse Gang considered itself very liberal politically and thought that the aesthetes, as I guess they called them, were sort of insensitive or blind politically. I don't know – I don't remember whether Eva was in the Gashouse Gang, because she probably was in the same kind of double bind that I was, I mean very much attached to Anni Albers. Yet I think that politically she would have been interested in liberal politics. I think that's what it is. It may have manifested itself in some community issues, like, oh, I don't know – whether or

not we should be raising money on vacations. I don't think that was it, though. I'm just trying to think of what community issues there might have been. There were always very heated discussions about privacy, whether you could put a Do Not Disturb sign on your door if you had a library book that somebody else might need as well. Because a Do Not Disturb sign was a very sacred thing. You weren't supposed to knock. But I think this maybe came later. I really can't remember what the issues were. It's interesting. I remember it was sort of an attitude more than issues.

**MEH:** You were at the college when the Studies Building was constructed.

**CS:** Oh, yes.

**MEH:** I don't really know where to begin with asking questions. So, why don't you just sort, just tell me what you remember about that experience.

**CS:** The college approached Gropius and Breuer, who were partners at that time, to design a building, a Studies Building, which they did. They built a model and made renderings. It was just beyond the capability of the college to build such a thing. I mean, the college couldn't afford to have such a building built. When Larry Kocher was hired as an architecture teacher, Larry, who was always very interested in prefabrication and in kinds of building systems, said that he would design a building which the students could build, which we could all build together, and that I'm sure seemed a very compelling thing to the faculty. So, Larry designed the building, a three-part building. You have that – It's one of the postcards.

**MEH:** Actually it was four-part.

**CS:** Anyway, it was a three-part building. Can you see it? The main portion of the building, the longer one, would be, would go down, be built over the flat portion of land, and that's the lake. The other two wings would come along the hill, they're uphill. The central portion would be hexagonal, hexagonal masonry thing and these three wings would jut out of that. It was decided to build the hub and the long wing first. The long wing, which started at the hill, was going out into the air. I mean it was going to be up on stilts, as it went over the low area. It was all to be wood construction, which we could build, and it was going to be sheathed with transite, which is asbestos cement in sheets. Larry was always interested in new materials, and this was an industrial material. He figured it could be handled and put up in big sheets. So the drawings were made and the work was started for the Studies Building. Almost the first thing that was encountered was that the soil was not stable. It was mud down to certainly a significant depth. So that was a great setback, and everybody was terribly worried about it. Charlie Godfrey, who'd been hired as the contractor, had a small crew with whom we would work on the building. Charlie, every bit a resourceful North Carolina builder, said "That's no problem. We'll just drive piles." Everybody sort of quailed at that thought. Charlie organized the whole thing. So we drove wooden piles. We cut the trees for the piles. We got a big log off a big gum tree up in the woods. He built a pile driver out of timber, a wooden pile driver, and we used our Farmall 20 tractor to hoist the driver log up and then step on the clutch and it would come down and hit the pile. I don't remember how many piles we drove, but we drove enough piles to build that

building. It was just very exciting stuff. Larry was a marvelous guy that he had enough faith and courage to do this, and Charlie was just the man for it. So Charlie Godfrey became one of our great teachers, one of our important teachers, of the architects.

**MEH:** What was Charlie Godfrey like?

**CS:** Charlie was a local mountain man, sort of rough character, a very good leader, a very good organizer of people, and obviously a little better educated than most of his cohorts. I believe his wife was a schoolteacher. I'm not sure. But Charlie was full of Buncombe County lore and was an interesting guy, but was very tough about getting things done the right way. They had to be done the right way. I think he commanded a lot of respect from local people. He certainly commanded a lot of respect from us. I think he was very highly skilled. He was a very good carpenter himself, but more important than that he was a very good organizer and leader. Charlie – I remember he had a shotgun in his toolkit because he'd seen a fishhawk above Lake Eden, and fishhawks were his nemesis. I don't know whether he actually shot the fishhawk or if he wanted to. I think he probably did. He was left-handed. One of the things that I was very impressed by was that he had the blacksmith make him a left-handed hewing ax. A hewing ax is handed. It has to be. It's not like an ordinary ax. I was very impressed with Charlie. I thought he was a marvelous guy. These guys were not only carpenters but they were masons. They could do absolutely anything.

**MEH:** How did they relate to dealing with Black Mountain students as a labor force?

**CS:** Well, I think that they probably had a certain amount of misgivings about working with inexperienced students. I think some of the students, Bob Bliss, for instance, had some experience and I think commanded a certain amount of respect. I think that Charlie and his men sort of got used to the students. They thought of them as kind of kids -- nice kids. But I think that they began to realize that there was a resource there. There was a labor resource. The kids could help. I could push a wheelbarrow as well as a laborer, and did. But Charlie could be a taskmaster. I remember building the Jalowetz house. I had some run-ins with Charlie and had to shape up. I think that what's amazing is that they could deal with the students and I think that the faculty really really appreciated him. Really liked him.

**MEH:** Kocher was at the college then. How did Kocher, Larry Kocher, how did he figure into this whole process of building? He had designed the building.

**CS:** He was very much involved. Larry was involved in the construction process very deeply all the time. He and Charlie and those of us who were sort of, oh, kind of more senior in the Work Program -- I mean, you know, it was sort of had taken responsibility -- were always involved together. I would say he and Charlie had their heads together quite a bit. Larry was a very hands-on architect. He, as you know, he'd been an architectural editor and could write, but he was a very hands-on architect, very interested in innovative techniques. I think it took a lot of courage. When I see it now, it took a hell of a lot of courage to take a job like that.

**MEH:** It's really amazing.

**CS:** Yes. It's still standing!

**MEH:** How did you go about doing this? Did you specialize in certain things? Did people become specialists? Everybody just –

**CS:** Yeah, they did. There were some things that we all did like labor or going out and cutting trees or something. Those of us that could. But we tended to specialize – carpenters, and the carpenters were sort of the main builders. Nan, my first wife, was a good stonemason. She couldn't carry heavy rocks. Somebody'd have to carry them, but she could work them and put them in the walls. Some of the women did electrical work because that wasn't too physically strenuous and they could do it. So we tended to specialize. Some of the people who were not particularly interested in construction would be given sort of laboring jobs that had to be done. Some of us in the architecture class had or developed a little more skill in things like carpentry. I think I may have described it to you – I had an experience in digging ditches. We had to ditch the land down below the building to try to drain it, and Nathan, what's-his-name?

**MEH:** Rosen?

**CS:** Yeah, Nathan Rosen and I were digging one day and Nate was, you know, he wasn't very strongly built. I think I could dig better than Nate could. But as we dug we talked, and Nate could see layers of soil and could see the saturation of the water in the soil, and as we dug he talked about capillarity and so on. I've never forgotten that. It's just incredible. Everything was part of the Albers learning to see thing. He was a lovely man. I think he was a very important scientist.

**MEH:** He was.

**CS:** I think he's gone to Israel. Very – wonderful teacher. But a teacher in the sense – I don't think I ever took a class with Nate, but I remember his talking about things that he was seeing in such a wonderful exciting way. Whether an experience like Black Mountain's could be replicated or not, I don't know.

[LAUGHS]

**MEH:** Did the faculty as well as the students work on the Studies Building?

**CS:** Oh, yes. Faculty and everybody worked on it. You know, some of the people – for instance, Trudi Straus who was from a fairly genteel class in Germany, people like that, were especially proud that they could come and be given something to do with their hands, which would contribute. I was very aware of that. Also Mrs. Jalowetz. It was especially important that we could work together. Of course, sometimes the roles would be reversed. I mean you were a student in somebody's class, and then at the Work Program you were telling them what to do. And that was okay.

**MEH:** You also worked on the Jalowetz House?

**CS:** Yes. Chuck Forberg and I were given responsibility –

**[END OF SIDE 1, AUDIOCASSETTE 2. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2]**

Chuck Forberg and I were given responsibility to build the Jalowetz House. We hadn't designed it. Larry had designed it. Chuck and I worked on it together, as well as did other people. It was quite an experience for me. I wasn't really very good at it, at organizing the work. I think I had some run-ins with Charlie Godfrey who didn't know why I couldn't do better. It took much too long. The



poor Jalowetz's were waiting for it for a long time. But they were always very sweet. I remember doing the finishing touches on the house when they were already in the house. Jalo would be sitting at the piano playing some score and singing to himself some opera. He was a marvelous guy. It was an experimental house in some ways. Again, we were using transite. We were trying some new techniques on the house, and we had the house plastered. We had a plasterer come in from Asheville. That was a skill that none of us had. But Nan built some of the masonry walls for it. I have a photo of that.

**MEH:** As an architect, looking back, what do you think was the real value of this work to you?

**CS:** Well, by the time I got to graduate school at Harvard, I could build. My classmates, some of whom could draw very beautifully, but nobody could build. When I had to draw something, I was always thinking of the materials and I was building it on paper, in a certain sense. I've come to realize – I felt sort of very much inferior to my classmates who could draw so beautifully and I couldn't draw as well as they could. But I've come to realize in later years that some of my very best students are students that could and could also build on paper.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING - BEGINNING OF VIDEOTAPE 2]

**MEH:** We had been talking about – I'm not sure just where we were when we finished, when we were talking. How do you remember Nathan Rosen. You took his course?

**CS:** No.

**MEH:** So, you didn't take his science course.

**CS:** I don't believe I ever took a course with –

**MEH:** What about Peter Bergmann?

**CS:** Oh, Peter Bergmann, yes. Yeah, I took his physics course. It was a small group of us taking the course. Peter was a theoretical physicist and the hands-on experiments, which we had to do were not his strong point. He was, as I say, a theoretical physicist. So we had to participate in setting up the physical experiments which, of course, was a very good pedagogical situation for us anyway. I remember enjoying that very much, being specially amused by that situation. Then I remember thinking what a joy the physics course was. We really enjoyed it. Every experiment was kind of a new exploration. I had the feeling that I couldn't be learning very much if something was that much fun, and it wasn't till years later that I could check my own physics knowledge against the knowledge of my counterparts in other schools that I realized that we really had a very good physics course. We all liked Peter very much. He seemed somewhat eccentric. He was a child wonder, a child prodigy and he had his ways. But he was brilliant, obviously, and, as I say, we enjoyed the course. He had a marvelous sense of humor, I do remember that saving grace. It's a wonderful thing. (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** Do you remember Alfred (SIC) Einstein's visit to the college?

**CS:** Yes.

**MEH:** Did he stay very long? Did he talk?

**CS:** Albert Einstein.

**MEH:** Yeah, Albert.

**CS:** Alfred is the musicologist, yes. Yeah. Einstein came. I remember it was a Sunday afternoon and we were all cautioned – we were told that he was coming and cautioned please not to have any cameras because, you know, it's always a private thing. He didn't want pictures taken. So we all respected that. I think I was on my way up to the Studies Building and Einstein was standing with Ted Dreier. I stopped, and Ted Dreier introduced me to him. The funny thing was that since it was a Sunday we always allowed – invited people from the community to come in and use the lake on Sundays. A man was there photographing his wife and child up against the lake, and as we walked past he had to put his camera down, which he did somewhat impatiently as Einstein and Ted, and I walked past. Then he put his camera up again and took pictures of his wife and child. Which I always thought was very funny (LAUGHS). I don't remember much of him except that he seemed very pleasant, and he looked just exactly what he looks like in photographs. Bushy hair and a pipe and no socks and so on, baggy clothes.

**MEH:** Do you recall May Sarton visiting the college?

**CS:** May Sarton? Yes. She came when we were at Lake Eden. She was visiting – I think she probably spoke. I don't know, I don't remember her talk. But what I do remember is that there was a big controversy going on in the community at that time. We were going to take some kind of a holiday or classes were going to stop for a few days or a week or something. I think it was something discussed in the community. I think it may have had to do with some opportunity for fundraising, something like that. I remember that in the community meeting it

was hotly debated, and I remember that Jerry Wolpert, my roommate, got very excited about something. He felt that in giving the reasons for his holiday the faculty had not been sufficiently candid, at least for him. So he got terribly upset and shouted, "You lied!" or something – I think to Bob Wunsch. I don't know to whom, which kind of was very astonishing and broke up the meeting. I think the faculty voted to censure Jerry in some way if not suspend him. I don't know what. May Sarton wrote a poem. She was sitting there. I remember, I don't know if it exists in her work. But it was a brief thing about her surprise at such a vehemence. That's what I remember about May Sarton. She seemed very pleasant and – I really had not heard of her before. I didn't know her work.

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

**CS:** Did I work on the farm? Not really, because I was somehow special in the Work Program since I was a carpenter, and farm work was one of the things that people who were not especially interested in or skilled at building did. I think Nan milked cows at one time, although she was a pretty good mason. People dug potatoes and did all sorts of things. Oh, Tommy Brooks once was interested in slaughtering a pig, I remember. He wondered if he could shoot the pig. He wanted to do that. Ross Penley, the farmer, gave Tommy the rifle and he shot the wrong pig. There was (LAUGHS) some consternation. I wasn't there. I heard about it.

**MEH:** What was the story, now I was just remembering, about the, the roofing on the Jalowetz house?

**CS:** Oh yeah. Don Page probably told you (LAUGHS).

**MEH:** Was that you, or Bob? Who did that?

**CS:** It was me.

**MEH:** What happened?

**CS:** Well, it was roll roofing and you had to spread asphalt tar on the laps. There was a bucket of asphalt on the shed and a bucket of grease for the tractor. They had about the same consistency. I got them mixed up so I greased the roof. (LAUGHS) I know Don thinks it's the funniest thing he ever heard of.

**MEH:** When did you realize this? Did the roofing slide off?

**CS:** Oh, no. It was a very flat roof. Somebody, I think probably Charlie Godfrey noticed it.. One of the things he would check on – had to be corrected.

**MEH:** What about the construction of the Jalowetz House. Was it fairly typical, conventional construction, the way it was put together?

**CS:** Yeah, it was traditional construction. It was what we call platform frame construction. It was very typical. One thing about it was that there was no power on the job, so that any holes that we drilled were drilled by hand and the excavation was done by hand. We dug the foundations. I remember sawing transite with a handsaw, and I remember tapering rafters, long tapers, with a ripsaw.

**VOICE:** Well, that's great.

**CS:** Because I remember what a ripsaw was and I learned how to sharpen it too, if I had to. But I think it was fairly conventional construction. Oh, there were a couple of things. I think we had reflective insulation in there, which was a brand new thing. Larry knew about things like that. Transite, of course, we used that.

The house was plastered. We had a (LAUGHS) plasterer come from Asheville. I remember he was a very elegant guy, drove up in his Cadillac, and he had a couple of helpers. We nailed the lath on and he plastered the house. I guess in more recent times we probably would have just nailed sheetrock on it. No, I think it was fairly conventional kind of construction. It was a thing that if Charlie and his men did it, they would have done it, you know, in a tenth of the time that it took. As I remember, Bob Bliss came in towards the end to help us. Bob was much better than I was.

**MEH:** Other questions? Oh, the little photos that we have here.

**CS:** Of the Albers House?

**MEH:** These little houses. Was this part of your architecture program with Kocher? Part of your curriculum?

**CS:** Yeah. Larry had an architectural class. Most of our architectural classes had to do with actual problems in the Study Building or things that we ended up building ourselves. But at least some of them were typical.

**MEH:** [INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT HOLDING UP FOR CAMERA]

**CS:** Well, we did these little houses to show prefabricated houses. They were modular houses. They could be prefabricated. Larry was very interested in that, and he had done some interesting work in it. Then we drew plans for these houses and built models. The first plans I ever drew, "A low-cost house for mass production." The idea was that it was to be a modular prefabricated house. Then we had a little exhibit in the Study Hall. I don't know who came, if anybody, but (LAUGHS) it was nice for us. I don't even remember who all was

in the class. I know Bob and I were in it, but I don't remember. Maybe Rudy, Rudy Haase may have been in it.

**MEH:** So in addition to the construction, you had an architectural curriculum at the college.

**CS:** Yeah. Well, yeah, we had a design studio. But that was about it. I think Larry taught us in the design studio lots of things – drafting and lettering and so on, just to get us up to speed. Then we talked a lot about construction but we already were up to our armpits in construction. We knew all about it, so that was fun. As I say, later on when I went to Harvard. I was in graduate school and all the other students had been, as undergraduates, in schools where they did nothing but draw. I was in a school where I did nothing but build. So (LAUGHS) – I thought I was at a disadvantage but it was fun. It's interesting that in the later years, in all the years that I was teaching at Cal, I always tried to get my students in one way or another as close to the real construction as I could. I hope that I did some good in that regard, because I did feel very strongly about that. So did Bob Bliss in his teaching, you know. We talk together a lot.

**MEH:** Do you remember Ted Dreier well? How was he? What type of person was he? How do you remember him?

**CS:** Well, Ted sort of an elegant guy. Always very very polite and well-mannered. Bobbie, his wife, was very warm and welcoming. Ted was interested in mathematics, was a mathematician, and I took my calculus course from him. It's funny, we had thought of Ted as not being an inspired teacher. But the calculus course was wonderful because he insisted that while we did the

regular calculus curriculum, we also took a seminar with him in mathematical philosophy. That was marvelous. It was just wonderful. It was exactly what I needed. It opened my eyes. So calculus became a thing which was very visual for me. I mean I could see it happen in nature and so it was another Albers eye-opening thing. He was very good friends with Albers, he and Bobbie. I'm sure that Ted – now that I think of it – that Ted was very conscious of calculus as a way of opening eyes. He was always very much involved in the administration of the school. I think he was acting as treasurer. Was a very practical person about the machines and so on. When we bought a tractor or a bulldozer, Ted was very much in the center of it and decided how it was going to be taken care of. They had three boys, were raising the boys there.

**MEH:** Do you remember Mark Dreier's death?

**CS:** Yeah. It was a terrible tragedy. The kid was riding on the running board of a car. He was a marvelous kid. Freddie – Fred Stone had some beautiful photographs of that child. Wonderful kind of kid. He was tragically killed. The car rolled over. It was so hard. I found it hard to face the Dreiers. They had a memorial for him. They were somewhat like Quakers in their feelings. I mean they just had a huge fire in their fireplace and people came and went and just sat there quietly. Then they – Bobbie took the body to be cremated and when she came back, I'll never forget that I didn't know how to face her. I was a kid, I mean I didn't know what to say. So I faced her with a sort of a long face, and she managed to say something cheerful. I mean she was incredible. It practically destroyed both of



them. It was such a terrible thing. Then Eddie died years later – many years later.

**MEH:** How did the college deal – I mean were you also there when Frank Nacke died?

**CS:** It was during the summer, so I heard about it. I didn't happen to be there that summer. It was hard to believe it. Frank was such a gentle soul, wonderful guy, and a good tenor voice. We had that Eugene O'Neill play, and he sang something from the period. If I think about it, I could remember what it was. Anyway, he had a nice voice.

**MEH:** How did the college cope with this kind of tragedy? For young people it must have been a real awakening of some kind.

**CS:** It was terrible. I mean, you know, we were a close community so it was like somebody in your family. It was very very powerful. And I would say it pulled us closer together but it certainly meant that everybody felt very supportive. Yeah, it was awful. I remember that it was just a pall over the atmosphere for weeks.

**MEH:** What do remember about mealtime at the college?

**CS:** Oh, mealtime was terribly important.

**MEH:** How was that?

**CS:** Because it was a time when you had to sit with anybody, and you could interact with people, sometimes people you didn't see on a daily basis. I think that there would tend to be good discussions at the table. For one thing, the meal would be at the end of the morning class, and afternoons would tend to be Work Program. So what was going on in the morning could be Ken Kurtz's

literature class or something, and the students would be full of it. I mean, so if you'd sit with somebody would just come from Ken Kurtz's class and you'd hear all about it, you know, Magic Mountain or South Wind or something. So that you got some of this. I mean, you experienced vicariously some of the excitement that these other classes. Dr. Straus's philosophy classes, I always felt I couldn't understand. I wasn't at all well-read in that area. That's one of the things that Albers felt – that we would waste our time reading . So I tended not to be well-read. But meals were sort of a great gathering place. The evenings, frequently there would be after-dinner dances – certainly Saturday nights, sometimes during the week. That was another important thing for us.

Sometimes, if we'd been shoveling coal down in Black Mountain, loading up the trucks and came back up to Lee Hall at the college, then we'd have this coal in your face and we'd have a ring around our eyes and so on. But we'd have to do it as fast as we could because the poor folks down at the railroad siding would take the coal as fast as they could. So you were something of a hero when you shoveled coal. They would always have a special steak dinner for us, and we would have a dance. (LAUGHS). We'd feel very special. Or if we were fighting a forest fire, sometimes we would volunteer to help fight local forest fires. There'd be an announcement at mealtimes, where often somebody would get up and make an announcement. I remember mealtimes especially not because of the food but because of the discussions. We all helped clear the tables and, served. The kitchen folk were always very popular. Jack and Rubye were very special people. I remember thinking how elegant they were. But they were

black and so it was frustrating and unjust. We always wanted them to come to the concerts and they would come but they would sit in the corner somewhere. I don't know. Anyway, I think mealtimes were just one of the places where we would automatically be together three times a day and that was good.

**MEH:** One other question before we go – your leaving. Did you have interludes when you were at the college? Were they having interludes?

**CS:** Oh interludes! That's the word I was looking for. That was the argument when May Sarton was there. It was an argument about an interlude. Jerry Wolpert felt that somehow he'd been deceived or manipulated, which made him furious! That was what that was about. Interludes, yes.

**MEH:** So why did you leave Black Mountain? Another thing – did you take the Senior Division exam?

**CS:** Yes, I did. I took it twice.

**MEH:** What was that whole process like?

**CS:** Well, the first time, I wasn't ready for it. There were lots of questions I didn't really understand. I sort of talked to folks around me and they said, "If they ask you who was the most, what was the great turning point in philosophy or in history, say Copernicus." I didn't know who Copernicus was. There were lots of things. There were some of the faculty who knew Albers didn't have us reading very much. They would ask who Giotto was. I didn't know who Giotto was. That was the first time. The second time I was... I felt much more at ease. I had taken some courses. I'd taken French lit. I mean, I could say some things. I had

read a bit more. I thought the exam was a ball (LAUGHS). I really enjoyed it.

They asked of course not only questions of general knowledge but also –

**[END OF AUDIOCASSETTE 2. BEGINNING OF AUDIOCASSETTE 3, SIDE 1]**

**CS:** They asked you questions which were intended to draw you out, asked you what had been an important experience in your life, as I remember (INAUDIBLE). Then there were some very kind of tech-, some more conventional tests. I took a test in French and I took a test in German. There were some physics questions that Peter had us answer and so on, which I remember being wonderful. I just so enjoyed that (LAUGHS). It's so funny. He asked us a question about how the d'arsonval galvanometer worked. The funny thing was that we had busted it in class trying to set up the experiments. We had to get the parts from the scientific supply company and put the thing back together again. I mean we knew damn well how a d'arsonval galvanometer worked. You know what I mean? But that's how life was. That time it was fun and it was fine and I passed it. Larry was then my faculty advisor, because I was going to graduate in architecture., I guess, by then I was playing the flute in some little chamber music things. John Stix and Mendez Marks had written a play and John and Mendez wanted me to play a role in it because it was a Jewish student and they thought I would be just the guy. But they were both of them – they were both Jewish and they were both kind of skittish about it. They asked me to play it without telling me why they were asking me, or what it was about. Of course, when I read it, I realized. So, then I couldn't say no, but I found it difficult to tell Larry why I couldn't say no. And Larry didn't want me to

be in the goddamn play. He wanted me to get my work done. Ohh! But I did it, and it was fine. Jack French said I was the best actor in the play. That was funny. (LAUGHS) Then I couldn't finish college because I was being called up for the draft. You could apply for the Enlisted Reserve, and if you were in the Enlisted Reserve, they would allow you to finish college and then go into the army. So I applied for the Enlisted Reserve and took the physical exam and didn't pass it because I have a deaf ear. So, they drafted me. I mean it doesn't seem believable. I was not happy. So I couldn't finish college. I went to Black Mountain for three and a half years and didn't finish. I did take some engineering courses in the army. After the War, at Harvard, they accepted me in the graduate school, even though I didn't have my undergraduate degree, and they actually gave me advanced standing. (INAUDIBLE). Well of course it happened that Gropius was the head of the school, and Breuer was teaching there, so there was no question about it. So Chuck Forberg and Don Page and I were all accepted.

**MEH:** And you were all there together at the same time?

**CS:** Yeah, we were at Harvard at the same time. We all graduated and Chuck went to teach at the Institute of Design. Well, they went on to other things and we separated. I worked in Boston for a while. I did work for Gropius and Breuer – Gropius's firm for a while and then I worked for some other firms. I worked for a big engineering firm. Then I got a teaching job in St. Louis at Washington University. I went there I guess in '55. I taught there '55 and '56.

**MEH:** Now were you and Nan married at this time?

**CS:** Yeah. Nan and I were married. We had three kids. We took three kids to St. Louis. Nan had left Black Mountain before I did. She'll tell you about it. During the War she had jobs. Then she was a student at Radcliffe while I was in the army. When I got out of the army, we were married the day she graduated. She was in anthropology. I taught for two years in St. Louis and did a little bit of practice. I mean not very much.

**MEH:** What were you teaching, architecture?

**CS:** Architecture. I was teaching design and I was teaching a course that was called Basic Design. I was very pleased with some of the things that I was doing. Some of the things were very clearly influenced by Albers. During a vacation, Christmas vacation, Nan and I and the three kids went to New Haven to see the Albers, to see Anni and Juppi. Alex Reed was staying with them. I was so pleased that I could show Albers the things that my students were doing. He wasn't pleased.

**MEH:** What did he say?

**CS:** I don't think he liked his students to teach. Well, I was doing various kinds of things. I mean I was also interested in social things, housing and so on, and I was getting into some of the slums and poor communities in St. Louis and recording things. I mean it was a whole new thing. And Albers didn't like that.

**MEH:** He didn't like your getting involved with the slum sort of things or?

**CS:** Well he, he smelled sociology or leftwing stuff. I mean he was very very allergic to that. He didn't like it.

**MEH:** Going back to Black Mountain, just two things and then we'll pick up again where we are. How did Albers react? I mean he didn't really encourage students to read. He – Was he terrified of a Communist presence?

**CS:** Yes. Yes. I think that was it.

**MEH:** How were you aware of that?

**CS:** Well, for one thing, he had a reputation among the Gashouse Gang as being an anti-intellectual. He hated Straus, and he hated Moholy-Nagy. You probably know his work. I mean he tended to write voluminously. Certainly his wife did. Albers didn't like this. I mean he didn't like too much writing about design. I can't say he discouraged me from reading, but he certainly didn't encourage me. I didn't do any reading. There were people – I can think of some specifically – who knew all about painting, modern painting and so on, because of what they'd read. But Albers didn't feel that that was important. I mean that they really didn't know about art, that it all had to do with seeing and not reading. So, I don't know. I mean it's part and parcel of the man and I was influenced in the other way too. I had one foot in the Gashouse Gang, and I was interested in reading. I'd always been a reader since I was a kid. You asked me what the perception of him was, why he didn't want us to read. I think that was it. I think he felt we didn't have time. I think he felt that there was so much to do. He wrote to my parents that my drawings were getting better and that for him that was a real measure of somebody's development (INAUDIBLE). (LAUGHS) That's very sweet. I have the letter somewhere upstairs. So, I can't fault him for that. I mean it was the kind of a thing that I had to go my own way,

do my own reading. That's how he was. But there were many people who just wouldn't have respect for him, couldn't have respect for him because of it.

**MEH:** What was Bill Reed like?

**CS:** Oh, he was a dear friend of mine. He was a very very sensitive guy, one of the most visually sensitive people I've ever met. So sensitive that it was almost –it was almost incapacitating, if you know what I mean. But that's not important. He was terribly sensitive. Also he happened to be very well read, and the Alberses loved him. I mean I think he was really like a son to them. Very very close to them. I guess he ended tragically. It's not clear whether he did away with himself. But he was a marvelous weaver, marvelous painter. He came to Harvard for a while and was in the architecture school with Chuck and Don, and me. But he just couldn't stand it and so he quit. He gave it up. And by that time he had gotten to know some of the people in Cambridge, including Kepes, and Kepes was very interested in Alex, and of course got Alex to come and help him at MIT. So Alex from being a student at Harvard became a teacher at MIT. He came out here after the War, and was living with a guy, an architect actually, in Mill Valley. Nan and I used to see him. He was really a dear friend, and he loved my children. He was crazy about the babies. If I have to think about who was the most gifted, sensitive, visual person at Black Mountain, I would have to say Alex. I'm sure Emil feels the same way. He must have told you that. A wonderful guy. So tragic to have lost him.

**MEH:** So, when you left St. Louis, what did you do?



**CS:** Well, I'd been in St. Louis for a couple of years. We liked it, but I really wanted to get into a practice. Bob Marquis, who was Lucian's younger brother, sort of lured me out to the West Coast. He said, "Well come out and try it for a summer, anyway." So we tried it for a summer, and he was just starting a practice, and so I thought well – We'd known each other and we went to Florence together, as you know. So I came out and moved the family out to Mill Valley. Nan still lives in the same house. You'll see it. I started to practice with Bob and asked Bill Wurster, whom I'd known when I was at Harvard. He was the Dean at MIT. Bill came once to St. Louis and he saw my classes. I think he liked what he saw. I was out here with my brother on a trip, and I asked Bill did he think I could come out here and practice, and did he think I could come out here and teach? He said, No. No. Both no. So I came (LAUGHS). After I was here for six months, Bob and I were starving, and Bill called me up and said "Are you still interested in teaching?" So, I said, (AFFIRMATIVE) (LAUGHS). Then I taught for thirty-five years.

**MEH:** At UCLA?

**CS:** I taught here for thirty-five years.

**MEH:** At Berkeley, UCLA?

**CS:** No, no. UC.

**MEH:** UC. Okay. Right, okay. That's right, this is Berkeley, U.C. at Berkeley. But you still have your own, had a practice?

**CS:** Yes. Yeah. Bob and I were partners until about 1972. Then we split up and I moved to New York for a while. I had a practice in New York for a year, but it

was a bad time in New York, so I came back here to teach and I opened up a smaller firm here. I just closed that about three years ago and do photography.

**MEH:** Good for you.

**[END OF INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPT]**