

Interviewee: JUNE RICE LANE CHRISTENSEN  
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

**MEH:** [GIVES IDENTIFICATION: June Hellwegen Rice Lane Christensen] That's a long name!

**JRC:** If you put it all together, yes. The numerologists would have fun.

**MEH:** June, how did you come to be at Black Mountain College?

**JRC:** Well, I married Dan Rice just before my senior year in college. I got my degree and he was just out of the service trying to balance if he was going to be a musician or an architect. He had gone to Black Mountain, he and Jack Rice, together, when he first got out of the service. He was there, I don't know if it was a semester or for a whole year. When he came home, and we got married, and I went back with him. So, I really went as a student wife. I was not a student myself.

**MEH:** What had you been studying before you went to Black Mountain?

**JRC:** I was getting my degree in physical education. But during my studies through P.E., I learned that I always wanted to dance. So, if I had been a little more mature, I would have probably packed my suitcase and gone to the University of Wisconsin, which had the only dance major at the time.

**MEH:** That's interesting.

**JRC:** Yeah. But I wasn't quite ready to take off on my own, and my parents thought it was safe if I was going to be a teacher. That was okay. So, I finished on their terms, and then Dan and I went back to Black Mountain. Then I really launched myself into dancing.

**MEH:** Did you take dance while you were here in California?

**JRC:** Just at the college – at the University.

**MEH:** What was being taught? Who was teaching? What sort of thing?

**JRC:** Well, her name was Jean Bellinger , and it was modern. I think she probably had a Graham background. It's hard to look back and remember now, because I've had so many inputs into my style of dancing. But, yeah, I loved it. Of course, Betty Jennerjahn and I, we just hit it off beautifully and had lots of fun creating together.

**MEH:** Going back to getting you there. Now at that point had Dan been in San Francisco?

**JRC:** No.

**MEH:** He hadn't been in San Francisco yet.

**JRC:** We went to Berkeley. After I graduated from UCSB. He transferred to UC-Berkeley and changed his major from music to architecture. That wasn't comfortable with him, and so at the end of that period we went to Black Mountain. It was after he and I separated that he came back to San Francisco.

**MEH:** How did you physically get to Black Mountain?

**JRC:** Oh gosh! (LAUGHS) It was hilarious. Dan and I bought a two-door sedan, an old Ford. We didn't know anything about cars. Franny and Charles Dreyfus

were in San Francisco, and Joe Fiore and his then wife, Anne Banks. Joe was going back to Black Mountain to teach. Anne, of course, was a weaver. Charlie and Franny were going back to Paris. So, all six of us with all of our belongings, pulling a trailer across the country in this car, and it kept breaking down, and the trailer broke down. I mean it was awful. Poor Anne got desperately ill. So, it was quite a trip! But we made it.

**MEH:** You made it. What type of trailer would you have been pulling?

**JRC:** Well, it was little... I think it had just one-wheel. (OVERTALK)

**MEH:** One for your belongings.

**JRC:** Yeah. Charlie and Franny had a lot of stuff because they were moving to Paris. They had all of their belongings. Well, we all did really. This was the Big Move. (LAUGHS) Yeah, wonderful memories. Tragic and sad.

**MEH:** That was when she, when Anne had her nervous breakdown. That was conditions to encourage it!

**JRC:** Oh, it was very difficult, because she was really in a catatonic state most of the way across the country. So, we had to really take care of her, bless her soul. Yeah. I don't know where she is now.

**MEH:** She was at the reunion.

**JRC:** Was she?

**MEH:** She died – But she's died since then.

**JRC:** Really. We're hitting that age.

**MEH:** And you're part of the younger group.

**JRC:** Maybe.

**MEH:** You are. So, you arrived – Did you have any real expectations of what to expect at Black Mountain?

**JRC:** I don't know if I did, really. I was kind of excited about it. Of course, Dan had been there for a period of time, so he had given me a lot of positive images. But I was very – I was very naive. I had been a very protected child. What Black Mountain was offering was beyond my cope or comprehension. So, I just kind of moved in at kindergarten level and gradually grew up. I did have to grow up a lot.

**MEH:** What was it like to be there as a “student” wife?

**JRC:** Well, there were several of us. Well, maybe just Vera – Vera Williams and me. We took over the kitchen as dieticians. That's how we earned our room and board. Of course, we could take any classes we wanted. There were very, very few women, or girls, on campus. I mean just – I don't know what the ratio was, but one to ten or something like that. It was right after the War, and all the guys were coming back. There were very few girls. When there was a party, we could dance all night because there was no lack of partners at all. I had fun! No one wanted to sit on the faculty. You know, one student could always be in on the faculty meetings with a vote. They always kept pushing me to do the job, so I was representing the students all the time even though I wasn't technically one. So, I felt totally accepted. I loved it. I was learning a lot. One of the things I've done since is to form a consulting forum, which I don't do anymore, called "The Human Curriculum." Looking at how we learn, rather than what we learn. That was my beginning of the Human Curriculum. How to take in information. I

wasn't particularly interested in subject matter. But I was learning a tremendous amount that I wouldn't have ever learned anyplace else.

**MEH:** How is that? What do you think about the environment encouraged that?

**JRC:** Well, I think a lot of it had to do with community – the sharing that went on at all levels, and the real openness and freedom and encouragement to be yourself. I always had done what my folks thought was what a young girl should do – except dance! Girls were not supposed to dance: that's why I didn't start dancing until I was in my twenties. But all of a sudden somebody opened a door and said, "Hey, you can go in there. That's all right." "Me?" Then I began to find out who I was, which was a pretty big step.

**MEH:** How would you compare the learning experience you had at Black Mountain with what you had had in the traditional curriculum?

**JRC:** Totally different. I don't even know if I could bring up a comparison.

**MEH:** Work on it! (LAUGHS)

**JRC:** Okay. At the university, it was sit in a classroom, listen, take notes. I was not a reader – never have been a visual learner in that sense and didn't start really reading until I was at Black Mountain. In fact I was an honors student at graduation, but I had never read a textbook. I took everything in auditorally (SP), and then I'd take notes. So, it was the kinesthetic plus the auditory that were my learning mode. So, I was really bored listening a lot, but I always had copious notes that everybody borrowed. It was a mechanical thing. You'd go in, sit down, there'd be a huge number of kids that they'd lecture, lecture, lecture. You know, pull out what I thought was important and write it down. Nothing

happened on a personal level, unless you just happened to have an exceptional relationship with a professor, which I did with several. But then that kind of learning happened after the class was over when you'd go in to drop off a paper or sit down and talk. That's what happened at Black Mountain all the time was this kind of personal back and forth. One of the biggest lessons I learned, almost right away, was Bill Levi stopped by. It must have been our apartment, or maybe it was the study, I can't remember. And knocked on the door and said, "Can I come in?" This was when we were all just getting to know people and he was kind of going around, trying to find out who we all were. It was just a mess – the whole place was a mess, and I said, "Yeah, you can come in, but I have to apologize," I said, "This place is a mess!" He said, "Never do that." He said, "If you don't like your mess, clean it up. If you like your mess? Hey, that's you, and that's wonderful." I thought, "Whew! That's okay!" That was just kind of the first invitation I had. That sort of thing happened all the time, you know, and as much learning happened in the dining hall, for me, around the table, through discussion. I didn't take many formal classes. I know I took a religion course from Dehn, Max Dehn. But most of the time I spent with Betty, dancing.

**MEH:** How did this come about? Your relationship to Betty?

**JRC:** Well, I mean there were dance classes first thing in the morning and so, of course, that was – (LAUGHS) The first thing I did was go down and get into the dance class. I was the most serious dance student. I don't know how it really started that we'd do it, but she had her technique class in the morning. Then we

just kind of fell into a pattern. Maybe we both would go down to work out in the afternoon, and we both would be in the Dining Hall. But we started choreographing, so the afternoons were for choreography. You know, I'd get an idea and she'd get one and we'd try it on each other. Actually, we put together quite a few shows. I think almost every month we'd have some sort of a presentation.

**MEH:** What would this presentation – what would be involved in this presentation?

**JRC:** Okay. Well, let's say I had an idea, or I'd heard a piece of music, or I wanted to do something. I'd go to somebody like – I know Joe Fiore composed a piece that he played, I think, on the piano. You know, one of us would get an idea for something and so we'd create it. Vera, of course, was very active – Vera Williams – in that. The three of us did a lot of things together, like for Valentine's Day we did a whole thing, being Valentines. We did a whole show on nursery rhymes, where we danced out the characters in the rhymes with somebody chanting them in the background. But we just did a lot of things. Get an idea and we had the freedom to do it. Pete Jennerjahn was marvelous, because he'd always come down and help us with sets, lighting, whatever. He was always there to help us with that. And no lack of musicians around to perform. They loved to help us out. So, we would just get something together. We'd say, "Well, we have a show." We'd advertise it. I'm not quite sure how the people from Asheville and around came to come. There must have been advertising somewhere.

**MEH:** But people did come from around?

**JRC:** Oh, people came – a lot of people would come. It was really interesting. We weren't terribly professional! (LAUGHS) I think back on some of the things I did that people came to see, and I think, "Ooooh, June." But that's good. That's good. And beginning dancers don't have that opportunity. One memory that just popped into my head: It must have been when Katy – Katherine Litz – was there. We kind of did a, I think, a story of dance sort of thing, and I was doing a primitive ritual. So, it was dark out there. It was all in the dining hall, and the chairs were set up and so forth. Anyway, my opening thing was a kind of a run and a roll and I came up and "Ta-hai!," you know, did this great primitive chant of some sort. The place had filled up and there weren't any more seats, and they had put people on the floor in front of the seats. I came up, "Huh-Huuuh!" and I was just absolutely (LAUGHS) this far away from a man's face. It was funny. Those sort of things, you know, that would never happen in a proper theater, that add such a dimension – to failure or success, you know – carry on after that and then where do you go? Wonderful memories!

**MEH:** Now was this done as part of the Light Sound Movement workshop?

**JRC:** That came later. That was when Olson came, I think, that we did the Light Sound.

**MEH:** What was your first year there?

**JRC:** Summer of '49. I was there that summer, then the school year, and then the summer of '50. That's when I left. I left with Katy Litz and went back to New York as her assistant.



**MEH:** So, you – Okay, so the first summer, that was the summer that Buckminster Fuller was there?

**JRC:** Yeah. That was that summer.

**MEH:** And then the next – Well, Olson was there that first summer, when Fuller was there, and then he left.

**JRC:** That could be, and it could be that I just didn't get to know Charles at that point.

**MEH:** For these dance performances, do you remember any sets in particular, the sort of thing that you did?

**JRC:** I remember one very clearly, because I wrote that up when I was applying for a scholarship to Sarah Lawrence. I wanted to do something playing with silhouette and shadow, so we had muslin sheets and then other pieces. I think there were two or three just maybe eight by four that I could dance in front of and cast a shadow, so that lighting would cast a shadow, or I could get around behind and be a silhouette. Pete helped me a lot with that. I can't remember right now anything else – That was kind of my big thing. (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** You did these in the dining hall?

**JRC:** [AFFIRMATIVE]. Yes.

**MEH:** Coming back to the dance – Katy Litz came in the summer of '50, that summer, and then you went back with her.

**JRC:** Yeah.

**MEH:** And you studied with her at Black Mountain?

**JRC:** Yeah. Oh, yes, through the summer.

**MEH:** How did the sort of thing that she was teaching – how would you describe her method of teaching, what she was doing?

**JRC:** Ah! It was beautiful, you know. I loved it. The first class I had with Katy – She had a way, she would do a very simple beginning like, say, a plié. Then she would plié and add an arm, or, you know, add a twist or something. Then out of the twist would come something else so that – You could see her between practicing what we had just done and what the next thing was going to be, you could almost see the wheels going on in her head. I was so drawn in to what she was doing that I knew what she was going to do next, you know, and it was so thrilling, you know, because I was – When she said, "This," I said, "Yeah, I knew that was going to come." When the class was over, she just came right up to me, and she said "Who – are – you!? You move the way I feel." I said, "Well lady, I've been inside your head all morning." So, we really hit it off, right at the very beginning. She was very important in my life. In fact, I named my daughter after her. My daughter's Katherine.

**MEH:** So, did you perform with her at Black Mountain?

**JRC:** [AFFIRMATIVE] Well, not with her, but I think it was that primitive thing. I did a couple of dances in that show. I'm not sure it was all history.

**MEH:** Are there other things that related to your dancing at Black Mountain? Either your studying or performing or – Did you take part in any drama productions? Was anybody teaching drama?

**JRC:** Oh, yeah, oh yeah. In the summers. What was his name? Franz – Can't remember what his last name was. Yeah, he did several plays and I played the

lead in a Noel Coward – Fumed Oak. Then M.C. – she put on the Jean Cocteau, Marriage on the Eiffel Tower, and I was the Photographer on the Eiffel Tower. Yeah. I think those were the two dram – Oh, and I did a thing where I danced the part of Cuchulain, and we did some sort – and I don't even remember what that was, but I remember we did it down underneath the Studies Building, down on the ground. And dancing on the gravel wasn't exactly comfortable! (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** It sounds like The Death of Cuchulain and that performance was outdoors, underneath –

**JRC:** Yeah, that was it. So, I was in that. I think that was it.

**MEH:** Had you ever been in drama productions before?

**JRC:** Oh, yeah. From junior high. I mean I was a real ham. I love being on stage.

**MEH:** Do you have any particular memories of The Death of Cuchulain, of that performance?

**JRC:** No. I really don't –

**MEH:** Except dancing on gravel.

**JRC:** I just remember that, and I remember Merce was there when we were rehearsing it, and I was very nervous because he was watching me (LAUGHS) work through this dance. Yeah.

**MEH:** What did you do for lighting down there?

**JRC:** I don't remember. I don't remember if we even did it at night. We might have done it in the daytime in just pure light.

**MEH:** Do you remember where the audience was? Was there an audience?

**JRC:** Must have been! But, no, I don't remember. That one I really have blanked out.

**MEH:** Are there any other anecdotes or memories that you have related to the dance program there that we haven't talked about?

**JRC:** Hmmmm. Nothing really comes to mind right away.

**MEH:** Did Olson figure into any of this that summer that he was there?

**JRC:** Oh. Well, the Light Sound Workshop, of course, was his – I think it was his idea. You might say he was the director. Maybe that was even the primitive thing, now that I think about it. Maybe that was the Sound and Dance. That could have been. Yeah. Olson definitely had a lot to do with that. You know, we're moving to poetry and original music, and I think maybe my silhouette thing might have been part of that, too.

**MEH:** It sounds like the sort of thing that they were doing.

**JRC:** My biggest memory of Olson was not actually at Black Mountain College. It was going down to whatever the pub was down the road!

**MEH:** Ma Peek's?

**JRC:** Yeah. Yeah. We would go down there, you know, drink beer and dance. I loved dancing with Charles (LAUGHS) because he was so tall. My nose would just about hit his belly button. We would dance up a storm and have a great time. That's my warmest memory of Charles. (LAUGHS).

**MEH:** Describe the physical layout of Ma Peek's. You entered through a door –

**JRC:** We went in a door. I remember there were funny little tables, you know, just – I don't remember the jukebox.

**MEH:** She served beer?

**JRS:** Yeah. Oh, yeah. We got our beer there. (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** What was she like?

**JRC:** I couldn't tell you. No memory of her at all. Just dancing then, just letting loose and having fun. Again, that was another door I could go through to explore another dimension of who I was that had never been allowed me before. Important lots of little doors opening.

**MEH:** What about the door you opened as dietician? You and Vera were working with Cornelia?

**JRC:** Yeah. George and Malrey, yeah. Oh, yes, when we took over the kitchen, it was just – We were appalled at the stuff that was in the storeroom – all of this canned hamburger, synthetic stuff. We said, "No wonder the food's terrible, you know!" (LAUGHS) So, we threw it all away. It was very courageous of us. We would go down into the Farmers Market in Asheville and pick up fresh vegetables. We found Malrey liked to bake, and we said, "My God, then bake!" We just put her all on baking, and she'd bake all of our bread and wonderful desserts and everything. George and Cornelia would do the other stuff. We'd come back from the Farmers Market early in the morning with bushels full, you know, like stringbeans or something. They'd just roll their eyes. They were so used to just opening a can and serving it, and they said "We can't do all that!" "Don't worry." Over breakfast we'd announce, "Fresh string beans for dinner if we can get enough people to fix them." Oh, we never have a lack of people coming up. They'd bring their guitars, and we'd sit around a sing and do string beans or peel potatoes or whatever. It was a wonderful experience, you know.

Yeah, it probably was more work but certainly things tasted better, and we saved money, which was very interesting.

**MEH:** Were you getting much food from the farm at that point?

**JRC:** Some, yeah. We'd get some meat. I think we got our milk and eggs. And churning. That was fun: churning the milk and getting the butter off the top. The work around the kitchen was always – Again, that wonderful community feeling, because, you know, you'd make up a list of who was responsible for dishes and every week that would rotate. So, everybody had a turn. The professors, teachers, the same as the kids. Everybody would pitch in. When everyone was in the kitchen doing something, there was a camaraderie that was very, very nice. Very seldom – a few people would kind of refuse, you know. (LAUGHS) But that was okay. "So, they don't do it!"

**MEH:** Had there been a dietician before?

**JRC:** [AFFIRMATIVE]. She'd left. I guess she left at the end of the summer of '49. Then that's when Vera and I took over.

**MEH:** What was Cornelia like? Describe her and George?

**JRC:** George was tall and quite dark. I don't think he talked very much with us. I know one recipe I gave him. I asked them to make a pilaf, and I wrote out the recipe and "Brown the rice in butter? Don't you know you can buy brown rice?" (LAUGHS) He didn't argue. He would just kind of, you know, be very cautious. Cornelia was sweet, but she also was pretty quiet. She was short, as I recall. Not as short as I was. But slight, and had a wonderful smile as I recall, a warm, warm smile. Malrey was more in charge, I think. She might have had a little

more smarts about her. I kind of got the feeling like she was the kingpin there, more the organizer and the one that held the thing going. But they'd worked there for quite a long time. I don't know when they started.

**MEH:** Yeah, they'd been there for maybe four or five years.

**JRC:** That's very interesting. But I know when it came to be Thanksgiving. Both Vera and I were appalled. They had never had a Thanksgiving off. So, we gave them a turkey and Thanksgiving off. Vera and I cooked the turkey, well, the whole dinner – pies, and oh God, I never worked so hard in my life. Cooking a Thanksgiving dinner for what were we? 150 people (LAUGHS).

**MEH:** I hope you had some help!

**JRC:** Actually, she and I did it! Yeah, we worked hard for days. It was a real accomplishment!

**MEH:** But on Sundays – They had Sundays off. Sunday afternoons off.

**JRC:** Yeah. I think we served Sunday breakfast, then we'd put out stuff. The kids could pick up things to make sandwiches and so forth. It seemed to me like I always had a whole crew of people in my apartment. I would go get the eggs, and so I'd bring home (LAUGHS) lots of eggs, and we'd all have omelets and fried eggs, toast, and stuff.

**MEH:** Where was your apartment?

**JRC:** Well I lived in a number of places, actually. When I first... we first arrived, Dan and I... we were up in the quonset huts? Is that what they were? The Navy barracks?

**MEH:** Right.

**JRC:** Yeah, we were up there for that summer. Then they moved us down to the big brown house. If you're going up the road, it was over on the left, and then there were – Nell Rice was on the top floor in one end and we were on the other end. Then there was a family underneath. We were there through the winter. I can remember stoking the furnace early in the morning, going out in the snow (LAUGHS). Then they put us in the Study Building. There was a very nice apartment – the very, very end, as you're going down the hall, on the left-hand side. I went down when I was there last, just this last December, and, of course, they'd put doors in where there weren't any and it was just kind of "No, this isn't where I lived!" (LAUGHS) "This couldn't have been it." It seemed very small and, of course it was just all crumbly and falling apart. But I said, "Yeah, that was it then." It seemed very big. And for Black Mountain terms, that was. It was a big apartment. So, we lived there until the end.

**MEH:** That first summer were you at all interested in the sort of thing that Buckminster Fuller was doing?

**JRC:** No. I didn't get involved in that at all somehow. I was so busy trying to just get myself located, I think. I wasn't aware. There, of course – Probably most of the people who had been there on a regular basis were very interested and involved, but I had never heard of Bucky and I didn't know what he was up to. I don't think I even went out ever to see the dome.

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

**MEH:** Did you ever have any interest in painting?

**JRC:** No.



**MEH:** You were a performer.

**JRC:** I was a performer. I modeled (LAUGHS) for them. That's about as close as I got to that. Yeah, again, that was a whole new world for me, you know. Growing up in my family, I had never been to a museum. I had never been to an art exhibit. I had never been to a live performance on stage. I mean all of those things were just awesome. The fact that there was actually a string quartet – you know, there as part of the whole experience, and to go night after night and not just hear the music, but see it, was wonderful. But we didn't have that kind of music in my home.

**MEH:** What did your parents do?

**JRC:** My father was a grocer. My mother was a housewife. Had been a secretary. Her idea of what girls should do is go to secretarial school and become secretaries, which my sister did – very well. But to put me at a desk and a typewriter and ask me to sit still! Forget it. I had to move. (LAUGHS) So, I had to find another path.

**MEH:** Did you work on the farm at all? Was the dietician work your –

**JRC:** Oh, no, I did some. I pitched hay, I know. I helped them, you know, in one harvest I remember. Of course, I went out and helped when the coal came in – emptying the coalbins, the big truck cars. That was – You see, these things were fun for me. Really. I loved it. We were coal black with all that dust, but it was just – I loved it. I drove the garbage truck, which I loved. They had a big old – it was a World War II weapons carrier, I guess, that we hauled garbage in.

**MEH:** Did you have a dump that you took it to? Did you take it to the town dump?

**JRC:** No, I think we had a dump. That's interesting. I don't remember where it was. I can remember driving that great thing. I felt like it was just a lark – little me driving that great big old truck (LAUGHS).

**MEH:** A lot of women felt that the school was really chauvinistic. Did you feel that at the time?

**JRC:** No. No. That wasn't my experience anyway.

**MEH:** I was thinking, you know, the fact that you were allowed to drive the truck, the big truck.

**JRC:** Oh, sure! Oh, yeah. I never felt any kind of restrictions put on me or prejudice or, you know, anything. But then that's been me all of my life. I just have never accepted that as part of my experience, and I think that pretty much you do kind of create your own aura around you. People will, you know, kind of see you for what you think you are. That never even entered my head that perhaps women shouldn't do that. (LAUGHS) I was going to do what I wanted to – especially once I was given that sense of freedom. That's right.

**MEH:** Did you ever go into – Surely you went to – Where was the Farmers' Market in Asheville?

**JRC:** I don't know. When we drove through it just this last – you know, a couple of months ago, I tried to figure out where it was, but – We didn't take a lot of time driving around. Went to the little gallery there. It was wonderful going to the gallery because Ken Noland's pottery work was on display. It was gorgeous. Just beautiful stuff. But I don't remember. In fact, I had a hard time finding the

road up to the college. Things had changed a lot, and my memory – I mean that was a long time ago. My God, fifty years ago!

**MEH:** You're right.

**JRC:** Yeah. So, – (LAUGHS). I've changed that much also.

**MEH:** Did you go into Asheville or Black Mountain for other things?

**JRC:** What, then? Theater and movies. It was a big thing to get a group of people together. Dan and I had about the only car amongst the students, so if anybody wanted to go to the movies, we would always say: "Let's go to the movies!" and so we'd fill it up as far as we could get it. I think that was probably it. Movies and Farmers' Market. I don't remember going in shopping. But we didn't have any money to shop anyway. You know, we were all just living on the GI Bill – what little we had.

**MEH:** What do you think was the effect of the landscape on the college?

**JRC:** I've never thought about that. It certainly would have been a very different place if it hadn't been out in nature. For me, the lake was very important – visually and just the energy. Of course, trees, you know. You can't beat it. See. I love being in trees. This is practically a tree house, you know. There's an energy that comes out of the natural world, which you don't get in a city. I know that was important to me personally, though I didn't know it at the time. But you asked the question and I think, "Well, yeah, it probably had a lot to do with the kind of energy that was in the place."

**MEH:** What do you think was the effect of the college's isolation?

**JRC:** At the time – Of course, it almost needed to be isolated to do what it was doing. There were an awful lot of people around Black Mountain and Asheville and so forth who were convinced that we were a Communist outpost of some sort. There was a lot of resentment about the kind of things that were happening. The freedom. There was a lot of freedom, in terms of what went on – not in the dorms but in the Study Building, I'm sure. But somehow that didn't seem to phase the students anyway. Maybe some of them, but I never heard any. But yeah, we were out of a town, we were out in the country, and I think that gave us a lot more freedom to do – to do what? Just be ourselves. To experiment with life.

**MEH:** Did you – I've forgotten what I was thinking. Let's go on and we'll come back to Black Mountain. Oh, Merce Cunningham visited. What did he do when he was there for that visit? Do you recall?

**JRC:** Oh, he taught the dance classes. Oh, yeah. We worked hard. Oh boy! Yeah. I'd never been that stiff in my life. You know, just – What, were there five or six steps up to the Dining Hall? I could not take the steps.

**MEH:** How was that?

**JRC:** I was so stiff. I worked so hard for him. I would just stand at the bottom of the step, and I know Nick Cernovich and I can't remember who else, they'd come along and I'd put my arms out and they'd pick me up and carry me up the steps! Then I would just go in and would just force myself to start dancing again. Of course, after five or ten minutes the aches and pains would ease off.

**MEH:** Was this because you were just working harder or was it because you were working differently?

**JRC:** Both. Not having a strong dance background – Maybe if you start training in dance when you're young, your muscles have more flexibility and they get more stretch and so forth. But I didn't really start dancing seriously until I got to Black Mountain and I was, what? Twenty-one, twenty-two. So, I had a lot that I had to stretch out, and I really worked hard. Of course, Merce was for me the technical end of my dancing.

**MEH:** Were you familiar with him when you came to Black Mountain?

**JRC:** No. Not at all. But, you know, Merce would always say "Don't lift your leg unless you can lift it all the way," you know. (LAUGHS) I'd reach – I never did have a natural extension anyway, and that's why I loved Katy so much. She said, "When you lift your leg, lift – feel what's happening. It doesn't matter how high it goes. It's what you're feeling that's important." That's much better. But I loved working with Merce. It was just a lot of fun. I mean later when I was married to Mervin Lane, and we came to Santa Barbara, we had the Merce's whole dance company. We helped promote a West Coast tour for them. They stayed in my dance studio. We built a beautiful dance studio up in the hills. The whole company stayed in the studio. So, we just had a week of the most wonderful, hilarious time, because they were such fun, just such wonderful people. Then every day after school was out, then I could take the whole company down into my dance studio at the high school, and then they would rehearse there. I got to do their classes, and that was such fun.

**MEH:** Who were other students who were in Merce's class at Black Mountain?

**JRC:** Well, you know, Tim, of course – LaFarge. Tim was very serious about his dancing. And Nick Cernovich. Of course, as I said, Vera Williams. And, you know, I can't think of her name. Another girl.

**MEH:** Was Viola there then?

**JRC:** No. No. Viola wasn't there when I was there at all.

**MEH:** I think she came that next fall after you left.

**JRC:** Probably. The ones that I remember the most I danced with, actually had, you know, one-to-one experience with them. I was very fond of all of those people, Nick and Tim and Betty, of course, and Vera. That was kind of my, my group.

**MEH:** Were there any visitors besides Merce that you remember in particular?

**JRC:** The only one I can think of is this funny little Chinese man who came. He wanted to teach. Of course, – They had a nice policy, because if somebody came to be interviewed for a teaching position, they had to present something to the student body, to the whole community. He could hardly speak English, and none of us understood a word he was saying. But he was a dear man, and I remember after the dance class he was outside on the porch there, and he was talking about martial arts – somehow. I don't know how we got onto the subject, but he said how he could control the circulation, you know. "Hit me. Hit me anywhere," you know. "It doesn't matter. Hit me hard!" "No, no, no." "No, hit me hard!" So, we'd go to strike him, and you could just see, it would just swell up before you could – That fast, he could send just a whole surge of protective – He just – He'd laugh and laugh. I thought well, I sure don't want to have to

have a fight with him. But that was his claim to fame. We did not hire him (LAUGHS). We didn't need to have that particular discipline taught. No, I don't remember any others. I don't even know if there were any others, if they came and I wasn't aware of it or if I've forgotten.

**MEH:** Who was managing the farm then?

**JRC:** Strayer, Frayer?

**MEH:** Trayer.

**JRC:** Trayer. Yeah. He still had the farm.

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

**JRC:** Yeah. Yeah.

**MEH:** Like –

**JRC:** Like, well, I can still see him. He was a very basic man, you know. He was strong. There was a kind of handsomeness about him. He was kind of in control. Of course, I was sitting in on the faculty meetings as the representative of the student body then. Of course, there was a lot of conflict between he and particularly Bill Levi.

**MEH:** What do you think was the basis of that conflict?

**JRC:** I think one was a liberal and one was a conservative. I mean it was just that simple, you know. They just were on opposite poles.

**MEH:** In terms of what the college should be?

**JRC:** What the college should be, or what the behavior of the students was, or – I can't even remember what the issues were. But I remember after one meeting

Trayer just really hauled off and popped Bill Levi, just gave him a real sock (LAUGHS) and he went tumbling down.

**MEH:** How did people react to that sort of thing?

**JRC:** Oh, we were all, of course, furious and irate. Bill was one of my favorites anyway. But at least that was my camp. I don't know if there were others that were thinking that Bill deserved that or not. I don't know. I don't know how that worked. Then, you know, it all blew over and Bill kind of laughed, I think.

**MEH:** What was Bill like as a person, Bill Levi, as you recall him?

**JRC:** Mmmm. Well, I was very fond of Bill. But I know he had a side that I didn't see. One night when there was a lot of conflict between he and M.C., Dan and I kind of scooped M.C. up and took her home with us. He didn't actually hit her. I told you the story. He would reach out. He really wanted to know you and to help you. Even though he was a very kind of proper man, in one way – I think he had a big heart. I really liked him a lot. He was warm, and, of course, very bright.

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

**JRC:** No.

**MEH:** What about M.C.?

**JRC:** Well, M.C. was just, you know, she was a magician! (LAUGHS). Delightful. Warm. Embracing. Fun. Free spirit. Just grand. A grand human being. Also very bright. But I wasn't very philosophical in those days, so – You know, in fact, I was kind of the laughing stock for a while. I don't know how much so. But after dinner often a group would go to – particularly M.C. and Bill's place, and there'd



be these deep intellectual conversations. Everybody would sit around and intellectualize. I would say, "That's true. Why are they spending so much time talking about it?" You know, that was just kind of my feeling. Well, there was nothing new about that! I had never thought about these things, but I said, "Yeah, of course!" and I would fall asleep. Here I'd be sitting in the midst of the greatest minds in the country (LAUGHS), listening to them having this great discourse. But I was exhausted because I had danced all day. So, I can still see myself with my head on Dan's shoulder, sound asleep, while they were all – Every once in a while I'd hear them – everybody – "Oh look at you!" and "There she goes!" But that phase, that intellectual atmosphere, that was not part of my life – at that particular point anyway. Never has been really, too much.

**MEH:** Do you have any particular memories of Max Dehn?

**JRC:** Yeah. I loved Max. That one class I took was from Max, in Comparative Religions. I was interested in that. Maybe he asked me to take it. I don't remember. There weren't too many of us there.

**MEH:** What was he like?

**JRC:** Hmm. Well, just like a very loving grandfather. You know, that would be the image that comes to me of him. I never felt like he was a leading force of any sort in the community. He was just a kind of – he and his wife were kind of in the background, like the grandparents, you know, the family reunion, kind of looking at the children and nodding and accepting. I don't think I ever had much one-to-one with him.

**MEH:** What about – I'm just going to raise some names now. What about Johanna Jalowetz?

**JRC:** I loved, I loved Jalo. Yes. She was just as dear as she could be and always inviting you in for tea and embracing you, and – Yes, she was a grand woman. Of course, Dan had gone there originally to study music, so he knew the Jalowetzes pretty well before Mr. Jalowetz passed on. Yeah. In fact, Merv and I went to see her once in San Francisco before she passed away. Yeah. I felt very close to her. I could have been in her family.

**MEH:** What about – who else was I thinking of? Oh, did you have any interest in the pottery things going on?

**JRC:** No. No, I really didn't. They were just building the pottery shed when I left, so it really wasn't even finished in full force. That was really the next phase. Now is that there anymore, the pottery shed?

**MEH:** The pot shop? No.

**JRC:** That's down too, isn't it. I tried to find that in December, and I couldn't even remember. I had a feeling of where it was, but it was like that piece of land didn't exist anymore.

**MEH:** No, it's gone. But you left at the end of the 1950 summer session?

**JRC:** Yeah.

**MEH:** And why did you leave?

**JRC:** Well, my marriage had broken up with Dan, and Katy had asked me to come to New York to be her assistant. Merv and I had become a thing, and he was going back to New York. So, I went back to New York. In fact I think Dan had

left and come back to California, so I no longer had financial support to stay there. The dietician was just – I probably could have stayed on as that, but I wouldn't have had any extra money to spend. No, that was just – That phase of my life was over. New chapter.

**MEH:** And what did you do in this next chapter?

**JRC:** Oh. Well, I worked in New York, and Merv and I were living together, and I danced. I went to the dance studios. I worked in a handbag factory in the office. Boring! Awful! Clerical kind of stuff to do, and I would stand up and I'd do it standing, then I'd sit down. My boss was in the same office, and he said, "Can you sit still!" (LAUGHS) I said "No, it's impossibility!" Then I'd get out of work and I'd go to the studios and dance. That was it. That was my life.

**MEH:** With whom were you dancing?

**JRC:** Katy, mostly, yeah, and some with Merce, and took some classes with a woman Dorothea Spaeth (PH). That was very interesting. She was working basically with people who were in Reichian therapy, and we did a lot of shaking and getting all of the tensions out and so forth and so on. I took – I don't know how long I'd been going. Then she came up, and she said, "Who's your therapist?" I said, "Well, I'm not in therapy." "Oh," she said, "this class is only for people in therapy. You can't come anymore." So, I'd go away, and a couple of months later I'd come back, and she said, "Oh, you got into therapy." (LAUGHS). The third time she kicked me out I finally said, "Okay, I've gotten the essence of what she's teaching anyway." But it was interesting work, very different

approach to movement. Which is good, because, you know, the muscles let go, with all this contract and stretch, and you relax.

**MEH:** Did you do any performing?

**JRC:** Not there.

**MEH:** What was your real intention at that point? Did you feel you were training to be a dancer, or – ?

**JRC:** Well, after Dan and I broke up, I had a bit of a nervous breakdown, I think. I didn't know it at the time. Merv really picked me up and held me together, which was a very wonderful part of our relationship. My main thing was just to recoup – recover. To get some sense of validation of who I was as a woman. The dancing, of course, was a very important part of my life. I could have gone back to California. I had my teaching credential, but that was like stepping backward. Somehow I knew if I did that, all of that wonderful experience I'd had at Black Mountain would have been like a dream. As I said earlier, I applied for – I thought I'd get my Master's at Sarah Lawrence, and I actually was granted a full scholarship. I was just on the verge of doing it, and I thought, "You know, that isn't what I really want to do. That's moving back into that intellectual – What I want to do here in New York is dance, and I can get more dance training in the studios than I can going to Sarah Lawrence." So, I passed that up. I said, "Thank you very much, but no." Then Merv and I decided to get married, which we did, and came to California.

**MEH:** Why did you choose California? I mean obviously you're from here.

**JRC:** Well, because I had a teaching credential, for one, and there was a stability there. Merv had been to California earlier, when he was bouncing around after he'd been to Europe, and he loved it out here. It just seemed like a logical place to come.

**MEH:** Did you come directly to Santa Barbara?

**JRC:** No, we actually came to the Bay Area. We would have stayed there. There was a job open for a dance teacher at Claremont High School. They'd almost handed me the contract when the dance teacher at Berkeley, the University quit her job to apply for that one. It was a fabulous – I mean for a high school job. They had a costume room that just wouldn't end and all kinds of facilities. It was a rich district, and they just apologized and apologized (LAUGHS) that they weren't going to hire me. But I had graduated from UCSB, and I was known here. They had wanted to hire me at the time I graduated so it was very logical for me to apply for a job here. So, I did.

**MEH:** And so you came down to Santa Barbara.

**JRC:** To Santa Barbara and I've been here ever since.

**MEH:** And what was Merv doing at the time?

**JRC:** Well, he – let's see, the first thing, he got a job with the railroad, Union Southern Pacific, and he worked there for I don't know how many years – until, let's see, it was after the children were born. Then he decided to go back to school. Yeah, I guess the kids were at the point where I could work full-time, could teach full-time. They were in school and nursery school or something, so then he went back to the university and completed his education.

**MEH:** He didn't have a degree at that point, did he?

**JRC:** No, he didn't. So, he finished his education, and then got his job at City College and that was about the time our marriage broke up.

**MEH:** And so you were teaching dance in the public schools at that point?

**JRC:** Yeah.

**MEH:** What level? What grade level?

**JRC:** High school. I had a very successful program. We had a great performing arts department. They all wanted to do things together, and cross over, and, of course, that was so familiar to me from Black Mountain. So, we did a musical comedy – at least one every three years. So, each generation of kids had the opportunity to experience that. Sometimes we'd do it more often if we had the talent that deserved it. Then I was one of the founding directors for Youth Theater in Santa Barbara, which was one of the best youth theaters I think that the country's had. It was often compared to what was happening at the Performing Arts High School in New York and always a very demanding summer for me. I had – Dance was required of all girls then. This was before there was Equal Rights for Women in sports. You know, you didn't have coaches for girls' tennis or whatever – just the teachers. But every – The philosophy was that girls should be girls and that meant every girl should have a semester of dance. Every girl should have a semester of swimming. Every girl should have a semester of tennis. These were lady things to do. Then if they wanted to play baseball and those things, they could the rest of the time. So, I would always have a lot of kids who wanted to do more dance than the required

beginning semester, and I always taught that pretty much as exploring movement – not too much heavy technique – a lot of choreographic principles. Invent a phrase in movement that does this or whatever. It was very creative. Then I would take the advanced students and they would be my performing group. Then after a couple of years I realized I needed an in between, so I had an intermediate class, which was a year long, which was dance history. We'd start with primitive ritual and go to the Renaissance, recreating what we could imagine would have happened within that period of time. Then the second semester would be from Renaissance up to Modern Jazz.

**MEH:** Is that sort of thing commonly taught?

**JRC:** [NEGATIVE]

**MEH:** I've never heard of Dance History being taught in that way.

**JRC:** As far as I know, I was the only person that ever did it. But it was wonderful.

**MEH:** Sounds fascinating.

**JRC:** Yeah. The art teacher, who was Jack Baker, who's a very well-known artist now, and the World History teacher, and I would teach in conjunction. We'd try to keep our art history and academic history and dance history kind of in synch. So, the kids who happened to be in all three were getting a wonderful education. They were hearing it, studying it, doing it, painting it, and it was very successful. That was my favorite class. I ended up having a very, very strong performing group, and we would do a concert every spring.

**MEH:** And did you continue teaching dance until you retired?

**[END OF SIDE 2, AUDIOTAPE 1; SIDE 1, AUDIOTAPE 2 BEGINS]**

**JRC** When I took my sabbatical, I studied alternative modes of education. I'd sent my daughter to Summerhill. So I had Black Mountain, and I had Summerhill background. I had two very, very different children. My daughter was an artist and an academic while my son was just Mr. Jock. He was the athlete and a musician. They both needed such completely different things educationally, and I learned through them a lot about different modes of encoding information. So, I became very interested in that and then started an alternative school at the high school. The prerequisite to get into that was to hate school. (LAUGHS) They said, "Who do you want?" I said, "Just send me the kids that hate school." I would start in – When they would come, their parents had to approve their being there, so they couldn't come in without their parents saying it was okay. The kids had to approve it, so the parents couldn't push them there. So, I had a lot of conversations with parent and student before they were admitted to the program. They'd come in, "I hate school." I'd say, "I know. That's why you're here." I said, "What I'm interested in is what do you love." "I don't love anything. I hate –" I said, "You don't hate everything." I said, "If you didn't come to school, what would you be doing?" "I'd be surfing." "Great! Let's start there. When is the surf the best?" "Seven o'clock in the morning." I said, "Good." I said, "If I give you P.E. credit for surfing every morning, will you come to school? I'll give you two hours to surf and then you give me two hours in the books?" "Yeah." "Or I'd be home working on my car." I'd say, "Well great. I really don't know much about cars, but my husband does." I said, "If I let you go home at noon to work on your car, and I give you credit for that, then once a



month can my husband come and see your car and see what you've been doing? Will your parents let me know that you've spent that many hours?" So, that's how we built their curriculum. Then I would just say, "This is what you have to have to graduate. Personally, I don't care if you graduate. That's not important to me." I said, "The State of California wants you in the classroom." I said, "School wants you there because we get money for it. Let's be realistic, you know. But if you graduate, it doesn't matter. When you're eighteen, you can go to City College. You don't have to have a high school diploma for that. Two years at City College, you can go to the University if you make good grades." "You don't care?" "No, I don't care." (LAUGHS) I said, "Here's the space. Here are some books. There's the library. This is what you have to do. Let me know at the end of the week what you've accomplished, and we'll see what kind of credit you get." So, I just threw it all back on them, just constantly throwing it back and watched how they performed. I had one corner where the lights actually didn't come on (LAUGHS). I didn't let them fix the bulb, because there were two kids that would go back into that corner, even pull a portable blackboard across, and they weren't doing anything naughty back there. They were reading. They had to have that space. There were some old couches. One kid would come in and sleep for an hour. I never said anything about it. He said, "Don't you get angry because I do that?" and I said, "No." I said "I'm curious why you're so tired." He said, "Well I have to work until midnight every night." I said, "Well, what are you doing?" "Well," he said, "I can't tell." I said, "Okay, but if you want to tell me – " He said, "Well," he says, "I'm not old

enough to do it." He said, "I sing at a bar." He had a beautiful voice. I said, "Well, you know, that's – You're learning a lot, aren't you?" I said, "What are you learning? Tell me what you're learning there." I gave him credit for what he was doing at night, and I gave him P.E. credit for sleeping, because that's what his body needed. So, that's how I played with them. When they'd come time for finals, they'd say, "Well, okay, I guess I better take the final in history." I'd said, "Good." They'd say, "Well what is it?" I said, "I don't know. You haven't written it yet." "What?" I said, "You've been studying it. You write the final." By the time they'd written the final, I knew they knew what they were doing. So, it was a very interesting experiment with space and learning modalities.

**MEH:** How long did you do that?

**JRC:** I did it for three years. It was exhausting! (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** I can imagine!

**JRC:** [LAUGHS]. Yeah. I would have up to fifty kids going through the program – not all of them all the time, but it was exhausting. It was rewarding. So, then I did retire, and my friend and I opened a consulting firm called The Human Curriculum.

**MEH:** And that – what was the basis of that?

**JRC:** Our thing was teaching how they learn rather than what they learn. We did in-service training for teachers. We went into the classrooms at their request and did seminars. We did a lot of learn-to-think work. We did workshops on that. I did that for five years, and then I just kind of wanted to do something different. (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** And that was?

**JRC:** That's on the personal journey, and I got more and more into my spiritual nature and studying that aspect of my life.

**MEH:** Now, how would you relate all of this back to Black Mountain?

**JRC:** Stepping stones. It was a big one. Black Mountain was more than a stepping stone. It was actually opening up a whole pathway upon which the stepping stones were placed. If I hadn't been to Black Mountain, I would have gone in a very different route and that would have been hard on me, I think – much harder than the lessons I had to learn on the one I chose.

**MEH:** And your husband – I don't know his first name.

**JRC:** Bob.

**MEH:** Bob, what does he do?

**JRC:** Well, he has done a number of interesting things himself, and right now he's working in the engineering department of Diving Systems International, which builds – designs and builds deep sea diving equipment. He himself was a diver, for years, and then he headed the Marine Technology Department, which teaches commercial diving at the Santa Barbara City College. He ran that department for fifteen years. Now, he's retired, but works part-time at Diving Systems, and he's having more fun now than he probably ever did because he creates things. Recently his business was hired to develop the hard-hat, the deep sea diving helmet for the movie Sphere, which opens this weekend. So, he was on set for about two months – training all of the stars in how to use the deep water equipment. This weekend's the big opening. So, we're off tomorrow

to L.A. to the big opening. (LAUGHS) Which is going to be fun. Friday night they're having another big opening up in Vallejo, where it was formed, so we're going to hit both of those, which will be fun. That was a whole new experience being on set. I have a whole different appreciation for movies. Impressive! So, anyway, that's what he's doing now.

**MEH:** You asked me before whether Black Mountain was really worth being remembered. Does anybody care. Do you think – What do you think, looking back, was the importance of the college?

**JRC:** The importance of it?

**MEH:** The value of the college.

**JRC:** Oh, immense value in that it gave all of us who had creative juices the space and the time to develop. You know, in a normal university or college, there were not those opportunities. No, my wondering if it's worth remembering, that has nothing to do with the value of the college.

**MEH:** Do you think there are aspects of your experience at the college that we haven't touched on that you think are important?

**JRC:** Not the college. Personal life, perhaps, that I'd just as soon probably not put on this. I mean the things that I learned personally about relationship.

**MEH:** Could you generalize without being that specific?

**JRC:** I think I'd just as soon not.

**MEH:** Do you think you would have learned those things as quickly in another environment?

**JRC:** No. I might not have ever dared to expose myself to it. I would have stayed in a safe cocoon. No, I'm quite sure that my ability to break free of all that had a lot to do with the college and its atmosphere and what it allowed in terms of personal expression.

**[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE 1, TAPE 2]**

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**