

Interviewee: BARBARA STONE RICE
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [IDENTIFICATION GIVEN. BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW ON

AUDIOCASSETTE ONLY.] Barbara, how did you come to be at Black Mountain.

BR: I married a man who was planning to go to Black Mountain [INAUDIBLE].

MEH: You were saying earlier that when you met Jack –

BR: I had known about Black Mountain but I had never envisaged the possibility of going there.

MEH: When you arrived, was it what you had expected?

BR: It was extraordinary. I found it very difficult because what I had planned to do was to study social science and that group was gone. So I had to find something to do there. I had typically gone to a junior college and there were no demands there. All the demands were internal pretty much. It was difficult. Secondly, listening to Jack talk, I was thinking about how I appeared there and about how unfinished I was. I was a young wife. I had no – those were the days – I think it was Olson – I either read it or heard it: “the artists and their women.” The place was a macho hell. Women were secondary, particularly if you were a wife. So, I remember Connie Olson once saying something about, “Oh, I’m not

important. It's Charles who's important." Of course, at that time I didn't mind. My faith was totally, inextricably bound with the young genius I lived with, so I would hear him talk in class or somewhere, and I would tremble with joy at his brilliance. So, that's the way I came to Black Mountain College.

MEH: But you were registered as a student.

BR: Oh, yes. I was student.

MEH: Did you go through the regular application process?

BR: Oh, sure. Oh, yes.

MEH: And you were a G.I.

BR: Yes. I had joined the WACS. I had moved to California when I was nineteen. I was at a total loss so I joined the army. Only I was underage and I was not eligible after spending a horrific summer in Des Moines, Iowa at basic training in the summer. The truth was discovered and I was sent home. When I turned twenty, I joined the WAVES because I still had no life in California. But it was a wise – [VIDEOTAPE RECORDING BEGINS] decision.

MEH: Do you mind going back and repeating some of that, in terms of your coming to Black Mountain, and your perception of women's role at Black Mountain?

BR: Oh, you mean that whole thing. Let's just – Maybe it's not meant to be!

MEH: Okay. Well, I have that on tape. That's okay.

BR: Do you need the expression on my face.

MEH: We'll come back to that with some other questions. So you had – you had GI Bill qualifications when you arrived at Black Mountain.

BR: Yeah.

MEH: You applied as an individual, not as a wife – to be a regular student.

BR: Yes, I applied as an individual.

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

BR: I thought I wanted to study social science, but I didn't – before I applied to Black Mountain, I used to consider what I really wanted to do, and it seemed to me I wanted – perhaps I should become a ranger, a forest ranger, because I loved nature and I wanted to be out in nature and be able to work, or maybe to work in geology, because you spent a lot of time out in nature doing that. But I had no idea. I never felt as though I was gifted in any way. I loved to read. I loved nature and I loved books, so I read all the time. I was out in nature. Landscape is very important to me. It's another dimension that I live in. I adored being – living in the mountains of North Carolina. In fact, the morning after the earthquake here I called Black Mountain Realty to see if there were any houses for sale at Black Mountain. But it was so disconcerting because they sent me brochures, and I was overwhelmed. I had visions earlier, just some primeval cabin that we could move in. But they were all tract houses now. They didn't have things like that when we were there. But I truly loved the place. My gifts really – I don't feel as though they manifested themselves there. I didn't start writing there.

MEH: What did you study?

BR: I studied dance, and I studied weaving. I was not at all gifted in the study of weaving. I'm not a tactile person. I don't do things well with my hands. I mean

I've had gardens and I've done things like that, but I don't think I was very much of a weaver.

MEH: Who was teaching weaving then?

BR: Albers and Guermonprez. But the community aspect meant a lot to me, and the intensity. The first time I came it was very different than the second time. The second time I came I was pregnant and had one child, and it was a very kindly place to be with children, in that situation. It was just being able to be with people at meals, other adults, and to have other little children that my child could be with. It was A wonderful green sward – greenswards. It was a very idyllic environment. Both times I left with a broken heart. It was very painful for me to leave.

MEH: The first time – Who was teaching dance?

BR: Betty Jennerjahn.

MEH: What sort of things were you doing? Did you have a dance background?

BR: No. No, she apparently had studied with Graham and so we were working with Graham technique. It was wonderful because we had – I had six dance classes a week and that was an intense experience. As a matter of fact, Jack mentioned the José Limon, Death [Lament] of Ignacio Sánchez Mejias, and when we went down to Mexico City I was very drawn to the bullfight. It was because of that poem which I loved. I love Lorca's work and I was pregnant when I went down to Mexico. I finally was going alone to the bullring every Sunday because Jack thought it was too bloody and too poor, that the matadors were not good. But I just had a feeling about it being crucial. I just felt

as though it was a very important thing that went on every Sunday. We also went to see Limon, who was dancing down in Mexico City. That was interesting.

MEH: Getting back to Black Mountain, did you sit in on any of Olson's classes?

BR: I sat in on some of them. I frequently didn't understand him. I'd gone back – I liked very much his literate poetry. It's beautiful. I've gone back to trying to read him with great excitement. I will go back and – I don't know what it is, but it's not – my mind doesn't work the way – I think he is a genius. He was a giant in all ways, and he brought such interesting people to the school. He brought Marie von Franz, who was one of Jung's followers and an incredible analyst and writer. That was my introduction to Jung, which has been extremely important in my life. I loved to talk to him. I loved to sit and listen to him. He was so interesting. He was galvanic, really.

MEH: As a student-wife at the college, you were saying before, you mentioned that women were – It was definitely a chauvinistic environment?

BR: Yes.

MEH: Can you expand on that?

BR: Well, I think it was – It wasn't just at Black Mountain College. It was the way things were in the world. But that statement of Olson's, "the artists and the women," pierced me to my marrow. There were women artists at the school that were very excellent and very intense in their work so I'm not saying that that wasn't a possibility. It's just there was a certain attitude that, as I say or said, it was perfectly natural to me at the time. When I look back, I cringe. It's so strange how – to be outside of your culture. It's most unusual. I mean it's so

natural. We're just simultaneous in a certain way. At least I was. But I felt as though the experience there was the most seminal experience I have had in my life, to that point.

MEH: The experience of being –

BR: Of being in that community, being around people. I loved being around people who were working. I didn't like social get-togethers. I loved the intensity of being around working people. That was the first time I had experienced that, and that was so exciting. The way if there was to be any kind of a program, everybody would participate. Everybody had some gift they could give. I think there was great humor, tremendous humor. I remember when John Casey (PH) and what-was-his name?, the one that walked barefoot all the time. He had an MG. Tommy Jackson. I remember when they left one Easter vacation in their normal – Casey always wore an army overcoat and Tommy was always barefoot. They were leaving at Easter and it was really kind of snowy or something. The whole school had come out to bid them farewell because they were going to try to get money for Black Mountain College and maybe new students. These were such marvelous emissaries to be sent out into the world! It was so wonderful. That's the sort of the thing that – Then it was kind of pre-drug days. I mean there were a bunch of alcoholics there, but it was different somehow. No drugs. In a certain way it still has an air of innocence, because there wasn't that sort of thing. There was an awful lot of drinking.

I've always felt sorry that my children could not have had this experience, and they too have felt so deprived. My last child, my son, has been at Naropa Institute for the last three years – studying meditative psychology. I have the feeling from the things he's told me that that's about the closest that any school has come to a replication. Of course, it's so different, and yet it has kind of the same intimacy, I mean, he's in a group. They started together, thirty students from all over, and they're finishing together. The first time we were at Black Mountain there were about seventy-five students. The second time there were about twenty-five or thirty. That's very small.

MEH: How had the college changed on the second time there?

BR: Oh, it was shocking when we got there the second time because it was so shabby and run down. We had one paying student at the school. It was terrible when she discovered she was the only paying student (LAUGHS).

MEH: The other people were just there.

BR: Just there on scholarships or they just were there.

MEH: Who was the paying student? I'm curious.

BR: Her name was Barbara, maybe Barbara Leeb or something like that.

MEH: There was a Barbara Leeb.

BR: There was? Yeah. She became very outraged when she heard she was the only paying student.

MEH: I can understand.

BR: Of course.

MEH: What do you think caused this – the physical – the loss of students and just the physical degeneration of the school?

BR: Well, this was during the McCarthy era, and the school was running into more and more poverty because I think its supporters I guess became afraid of supporting a suspect institution. There was one black girl that was there. That was the illegal aspect. I don't believe that having Asawa there was illegal, no. It was interracial, and I think that was illegal in Georgia, not Georgia, in North Carolina, at the time.

MEH: I'm not sure it was illegal, but it definitely was – because they had looked into that.

BR: It was something.

MEH: But things were not integrated. It definitely went against the grain of what was acceptable.

BR: (OVERTALK) Yeah, it did. I thought it was illegal. Another thing was that the GI Bill was running out. A lot of GIs came to the school, I think, after the War, and their GI Bill – That paid tuition. So, the GI Bill was running out, the people who donated money to the school were stopping donating because of – what I had heard was because of the McCarthy scare. Paul Williams, I think, supported the school for a long time, but then he started some community and that pulled away a lot of support that was necessary. It was very sad. Jack and I when we were in New Mexico had found a gorgeous piece of land. It was called Tres Piedras and maybe that's what the name of the area was, but it was an old ranch that looked like it had been abandoned. We brought up the possibility

that maybe we could have a Black Mountain West, Southwest, or something. Some letters went back and forth but nothing happened. Then Jack resigned, and really dramatically, and we left, which was oh – it was catastrophic. I mean we had two little ones, and Jack had a useless degree from Mexico City College. He'd gone down there to study anthropology with this Robert Barlow, this ethnologist who was editing a literary magazine in Nahuatl. He had committed suicide about a week before we arrived there and the department, the anthropology department Jack disliked intensely, so he ended up becoming part of a writing center down there and teaching, I think, a little class. But he ended up with a bachelor's degree in English or something, which was useless. So we came back to California, and we had spent about seven years living in places like Mexico and New Mexico and Black Mountain and some time in Santa Barbara. It was like a paradise lost, because all of a sudden my wonderful genius husband had to go out into the world. He decided that he would study stonemasonry, by just being a stonemason, because I think Jung had said that stonemasonry was the king of scul- – I can't remember. He loved sculpture and he wanted to do architectural sculpture so he thought stonemasonry would be the closest thing to it. So he just went out – I think he got a job for about three months, and he learned some basics and then just sort of went out on his own. It was, believe me, a time of intense poverty, suffering, loneliness to be torn out of this world that was so alive for us and into the workaday horrors of trying to make a living, because the customers would look

over his shoulder and gush, "Oh, you're an artist." Then he'd make, you know, a little money. He wasn't able to support us, and we were so poor.

MEH: Where were you living then?

BR: Well, we lived on Mount Washington, which is right where the Southwest Museum is, and it's kind of a charming mountain community, close to L.A. Then we moved here. We lived there for about two years, and we've lived here forty-one years. We love Topanga very dearly. We tried for many years to leave Topanga. We spent a lot of time looking for land in the north. We ended up buying a very magnificent piece of land on an island in British Columbia, Malcolm Island. It had been a Finnish community, had been a true cooperative that had been started in the beginning of the century. Only Finns lived on the island. But when we bought our land there, that had broken down. It was like an Ingmar Bergman landscape. We bought land with two other people, and that didn't work. We ended dividing the land up and they sold theirs. We had about seventeen acres going into this pristine forest behind us and we were right on the ocean. But Jack decided it was too far away from everything. It was about 1600 miles away from here, so it wasn't too good for vacations. We thought our children couldn't share it, and so we sold it.

MEH: So he was working as a stonemason, trying to pay for food and rent. You had two children at that point?

BR: I had three children. By the time we moved here I had another little girl. I had three daughters. It was wonderful. There were three. My first child was so harmonious. She sort of set a standard for the rest of the following children, and

because we lived up here and I didn't have a car, and there weren't huge gangs of kids around, we didn't have that tyranny of – So that we had – They sort of made their own little community. We got goats, and had goat milk and made yogurt and kefir and then we had organic gardens and we baked all our bread. I wouldn't have a TV, comics, comic strips, or junk food in the house. I said they could do that somewhere else, but here they couldn't do it. They grew into such wonderful girls, and they're such wonderful women, and they all live here.

MEH: In Topanga?

BR: In Topanga, with their children. That was such a great thing, having a close family. Then my son is in Naropa, but he's going to come back to California. We can't seem to tear ourselves away from Topanga. It's funny. Sometimes I question it – the fact that everybody's still here.

MEH; But when you have heaven, why – where else would you go?

BR: I don't know. I know James Hillman – Do you know who he is? Oh, he's a Jungian, and he gave a lecture once saying that it's so important that the children leave and find their treasure but then to bring it back to the family was so crucial. They did leave. They all went somewhere to study and so on. It's as though they did bring back their treasure and Aran. I have found it so nurturing to have these people to love and to share intimately in our life. It's meant a lot to – It's meant so much to Jack and myself.

MEH: Oh, it must be tremendously rewarding. When you see so many parents who have lost their children.

BR: It seems – It's so cruel. Well I think everything in our culture legislates this mobility. We were wise in our choice of a homeland, because our children love it. They left and they came back, and they came to a community that they were familiar with. Many people from this community left because it became too rich. It cost too much to buy land, and so people who had land would sell it for money and then go somewhere else. But I've always felt that moving away from a place that you've worked in, and you've participated in the way we have – because Jack was so well-known and revered in this community because of his extraordinary work, wonderful work. That means so much. Because I think when people our age move, you can never really sink the roots down. We're rooted, whether we like it or not. But I hate the summers here.

MEH: How is that?

BR: Hot. Very, very unrelievably hot. But every other season just moves me so profoundly because my poetry is so connected with this landscape, this tenacious, rock-ribbed landscape. Violent land.

MEH: Why don't you read maybe a couple of poems and we'll come back and talk some more.

BR: Well, this is a poem that I wrote after I'd gone to Greece. I'm a great lover of Greek mythology, and I went to Greece with a group of people that I'd studied Greek mythology with for years. Have you been to Greece?

MEH: No.

BR: Here's a poem – I'd gone to Argos. [READS] "The sanctuaries are closed. How beautiful the yellow lichen on the pillars. The flies worry my shoulders but the

wind at my back is kind. The devout having forgotten the way, read guidebooks. I circle the pocked stones. They fit upon one another like brothers making a room. Hera, honeycomb. The snail's love you goddess. They leave their intricate houses for you to rest in. Cow-eyed Hera. I feel her garments blowing sweetly in the wind, her fragrance. The silent stones left in charge watch over the plain of Argos. You could hear autumn if you are quiet."

Here's a poem that I wrote about my land in Sointula, which is in British Columbia. Sointula means harmony, in Finnish. [READS] "Sointula has no saints for its fishermen. They are on their own. No beads, no holy metals. The only lady they pray to is luck. Phylacteries of seaweed hang from their nets. Their icons are money and the grief of making it."

"The shining olive tree has no need of speech. It expresses its bitterness in its hard black fruit."

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

MEH: Now start that again.

BR: [READS] "The shining olive tree has no need of speech. It expresses its bitterness in its hard black fruit. I am a danger to myself and others with my love of words, the gold of fools. Someone hides behind the words with a peeled face, and knots the wool."

"Today, thirteen black crows wheeled overhead. It made perfect the yearning, the loneliness, the wind. And then to come home to winter sharing my bed. I don't ask for more."

"The mother of my father, a lost Rebekah (?) from more Biblical time, made children and died. Birth is not pretty nor is it natural to write poems. Sometimes the mother tears. Once I dreamed her, smiling in a mirror, at the mystery of breasts."

"Tenacious (PH). Each moment contains its own secret, which is heavy for it to bear. The hours yearn to be discovered, their meaning read and made clear to them. In the hidden life of rocks holding their blind faces to the sun something is revealed which does not know itself. He who comes carrying the mirror evokes the sweetness of recognition. The grapevine imitates the path of the serpent who was the father."

"Little sister, my pain, the waters of life are salt. We come from a black iron womb, one of many. We are the living bread, but who will eat us?"

"The old woman draws me a map to grow old by the lines on her face. The north horse drinks from spring of her mouth. Dry-throated, she sings, throat big with anger. The veins darken. Afraid of the dark, she looks at winter with white eyes."

This is a poem I wrote this last year. A lot of this is old work. [READS] "My hands two solar collectors face the sun. October hurrying towards November is masked, carries a pumpkin. Last night had no place for me to sleep. I work my way through its numbers, carrying bedclothes and old age. No branch to perch on, no hand to hold, no ear to listen. Once I danced to a poem by Lorca. Once I slept in a bed in a house with a husband. Those winter nights were dark and the wind prowled outside. I was inside and there were children sleeping. Once

my son told me that kids like happy endings. They like to sit in front of the TV and laugh."

"The green shaft of the narcissus thickens. The father of the child is far away. The carob pod swells around the seed. My bread seed is fear. My face is fragile this morning. I see the girl in the woman's face, the pruned rose stands naked in winter. My husband speaks of my little ways. He finds me terrible as a mother. The black crow, the black fly. The sleeping narcissus is first to bloom, waits for spring."

"With each child I lost a tooth, a piece of the puzzle. As each child left, carrying one tooth and a perfect smile, I lost the mother."

"Flora. My heart is in my throat this morning. I walk fast. Mugwort, poppy, daisy. The Mercedes, bathed and perfumed pass. I sweat and hold my breath. Wild tobacco, lupin, yucca. The clouds are friendly, move slow with pale blue underwear. Oleander, sweet pea, yarrow. Ring-tailed hawk chased by crow. Dogshit on the road. Buckwheat, mustard, Indian paint. I look for feathers, find a bone. Artemisia, sage, prickly phlox. I'm almost home. It's uphill all the way."

"Sweetmeat. The white foal lies on the ground, flies are thick as cloves. Its mother, a freckled mare, chews her hay. He is white sugar, sweet to the flies as summer."

"Revelation. Red Rock Canyon has no secrets anymore. It's creek, congealed and mute, knows no bounds. Nature has shown her teeth. There is a silence here, the silence of burn pitted and pocked. The wild cucumber has made the first comeback. She drapes herself casually, as beautiful as a parasite."

There was a fire –

MEH: How long have you been writing poetry?

BR: I was a very late poet. I started when I was forty-eight. I'm now seventy-two.
But I'm not writing now. I'm just dried up.

MEH: Do you read your poetry?

BR: Oh, I've read my poetry and I've had some of the work published. I haven't, I almost got a book published but that didn't happen. It's hard to get work published if you're not part of a political group of one kind or another. I know I should do it myself.

MEH: Looking back, going back to Black Mountain, having listened to your poetry now. What do you think was the impact of Black Mountain on your life?

BR: Oh it was enormous. Even though I didn't write poetry, it's as though it transformed my life.

MEH: Can you be more specific?

BR: It was as though something opened, something was fed. It was kind of like an Eden. We left the first time and it was so hard leaving, and then we came back. We left the second time and then we encountered so much hardship. It was just like an Eden, and then we would hear about what was going on there. They were killing off the last of the herd and burning the buildings for heat. It was terrible what was happening. It was like the Gates of Eden had closed, with these fiery angels standing there. So now we're here, and I'm a crone. It's so interesting to be a crone. It has been very liberating. I the other day was thinking about how when I moved here I was so amazed and exalted by this

landscape, but it – it's so different. It's like my skin, my second skin. You know, it's like this house is like my mother. This landscape is – it's sort of what van der Post said once. He spoke to a Bushman who said that, "The white man knows where he lives, or the landscape surrounding him. But the Bushman is known by the landscape he lives in." I feel known, and particularly because so much of my work has been evoked by this landscape. It just is so evocative for me. It just calls to me. I hope I can begin to write again.

MEH: What do you do with your time now? You take care of your husband pretty much.

BR: Yeah, I take tremendous amounts, an enormous amount of care doing domestic things. I like being physical. I like clearing the property and chopping wood and carrying wood. I like that very much. But an awful lot is making osso buco for Jack and making endless broths and potions and trying to save him. It devours my life and, oh, it's always useful because otherwise, what would be my reason for being? I have to start writing again. That's what I need. I'm very interested in healing, and I've had wonderful healings myself and had wonderful mystical experiences. I've been very grateful for that. It wasn't cheap. It was very expensive. I went to Greece ten years ago and had about six hours on a boat inhaling diesel fumes and became chemically sensitive from that. So I've spent the last ten years looking for healing. It's so strange, because it's been such a limiting factor in my life and yet it's given me so much at the same time. In the world of healing – I'm a Pisces with six water signs. So I'm very close to the unconscious, and I've really been gifted. I spent a lot of time – I used to, I

am not remembering them anymore – but my dreams have been tremendously important for me. It's been literally a spiritual path. I hike every day. I go to Red Rock Canyon, which is straight across there. If you ever spent the night here, you could walk with me to the top. So, I hike in Red Rock every day. I take care of this place. It requires an enormous amount of work.

MEH: I imagine.

BR: I read a great deal.

MEH: And see your children and grandchildren.

BR: I have children and grandchildren and I'm omnipresent. They're very fascinating to me. I have a daughter who is a painter and sculptor whose work is around. All of her old work – That's not so old. She's a wonderful artist. She just started a business, a school in Topanga and she's got forty students. She's wonderful. She's a wonderful sculptor, particularly sculpture. I have another daughter who's a landscape designer and contractor, and another daughter who just had a broken neck a couple of years ago. She now works in the Canyon. She was saved. My son – I had my son after we'd been married twenty years. He was fifteen years younger than Megan and ten years younger than Anthea, so it was like having another family, really. But it's been such a wonderful thing to be with a young masculine. It's so wonderful. I feel very rich, as though I can give my children a great deal. That is such – that's so fine, because I didn't have that myself. So – what else? I worked in the local school when I came here. I was a librarian. I loved the work because I love story. I loved reading wonderful stories to children and getting them to love books and to stay a little bit away from TV.

That was so marvelous. When I developed my chemical sensitivities, I couldn't work there anymore, so I had to reinvent my life.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]