

Interviewee: JOHN CORKRAN  
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

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

**JC:** Well, I don't know completely the circumstances, but my father got the job at the college. He had been teaching at North Shore Country Day School. We had lived in Winnetka all our lives, which was eight years, I guess, and suddenly we found ourselves down in North Carolina.

**MEH:** How old were you?

**JC:** I was going on eight.

**MEH:** Had you been attending North Shore Country Day School?

**JC:** Yes. I attended North Shore Country Day School through second grade, and then we spent a year at my grandmother's house in Glens Falls, New York. I attended school there for a year and then came to Black Mountain to start the third grade. Interestingly enough, the school – the public school in Black Mountain – was more advanced than either the private school I'd been going to or the public school.

**MEH:** How was that?

**JC:** Well, they were doing math that I didn't know how to do, and Miss Jessie Tipton slapped me on the wrist because she thought I should know how to do short division. So my folks transferred us to the Asheville Country Day School, and we went to Asheville Country Day School – I did – for third and fourth grade. Came back to Black Mountain Grammar School to find out that Miss Jessie Tipton had transferred from third grade to fifth grade. [LAUGHS] So she was now my teacher. However, in the two years at Asheville Country Day School, I'd surpassed the third and fourth grades in the public school so that when I came back I was a good student and Miss Tipton and I got along just fine.

**MEH:** Did she slap your wrist? [OVERTALK]

**JC:** Never!

**MEH:** Did you change schools because she slapped your wrist, or because you needed a different type of attention?

**JC:** Well, I think it was the latter. We'd been going primarily to North Shore where you had small classes. At Black Mountain you had about thirty-five to forty kids in each class, and I think my folks just thought we'd benefit from a smaller class. Asheville Country Day School, I think my class was seven or eight kids, in total. We may have added one when we went from third grade to fourth grade, but we had some wonderful teachers. My fourth grade teacher was a woman named Grace Darcy, whose husband taught at the Christ School – Christ Episcopal School – which is a boys' prep school. She was just a marvelous human being, and I think maybe she did a lot for my confidence as well as the education that took place. We were a very tight-knit group. So when

I got back to Black Mountain, I don't remember being particularly miffed that Miss Tipton was my teacher, and I certainly never had any significant run-ins with her in the fifth grade.

**MEH:** Why did you go back to the Asheville schools? [TELEPHONE RINGS] Why did you go back to the Black Mountain public schools?

**JC:** I don't know that. My father years later would say that that experience was important for us to have. It might have been money. I really have no idea. I have – Whether it was he felt we were educationally better developed to handle that, or whether it was finances or what, I don't know. Now he always said later that having that democratic experience in the public school was something that we needed. Who knows? [LAUGHS]

**MEH:** You were two or three years younger than David?

**JC:** Actually a year and a half.

**MEH:** So you were pretty close together.

**JC:** Right. Right.

**MEH:** One or two grades apart?

**JC:** One grade apart. Yeah, yeah. He was born in May and I was born in December, so I was always one of the youngest kids in my class, but I was also one of the biggest. [LAUGHS]

**MEH:** Can you remember your first impressions of the college? Do you remember your arrival?

**JC:** I can't. I mean my impressions of the college are – Hmm. There are so many images that come to mind. I couldn't really place any of them in a particular

continuum of time. Oh, gosh. I can remember eating at the Dining Hall, but I don't know when we started to do that. Quite early on, my folks ate most of their meals at home, and we ate in the Dining Hall, even breakfast.

**MEH:** Why was that?

**JC:** I think my father thought it was time to relax and time to kind of gather his thoughts. He had daytime classes and he had nighttime classes. I don't think my father was as egalitarian as many Black Mountain faculty members either liked to think they were or were. He felt there was a distinction. He liked the small classes and I think he liked the energy that especially the veterans brought. But I don't think that he thought it was necessary, particularly, to be – I don't want to say an "equal" [LAUGHS] – or appear to be an equal. I think he thought some distance was appropriate and that teaching intimacy was fine and social intimacy was for the family. But we ate there all the time.

**MEH:** What images – you said there are images that are particularly vivid. What images are particularly –

**JC:** Loading coal with the students. Most of the furnaces were coal burning, and the college would order a coal car. The coal car would be delivered to a siding down by the Morgan Furniture Manufacturing Company. Then we would unload the coal car. The way you unloaded the coal car – because it was chunks of anthracite – was you threw them up out of the coal car. Of course, you started throwing them down, because you were on top of the load, and eventually as you got toward the bottom of the car you had to throw them up. I remember that because you would have people sitting astraddle the edge of the coal car and

catching the coal and tossing it into the truck, so I remember that. That was always exciting.

I remember the farmers. When we were first there, Ross Penley was the farmer, and Ross had four sons, I think – Rex, Max, Jack, and Toots, who was Roger. I played with Toots a lot. We found out at one point that Jack, who was closer in age to my brother, Dave, couldn't read. So he was eleven maybe? He couldn't read. So I remember – I don't know whether it was Dave or my mother or whom, reading to him, reading the comics.

I remember putting hay up. The college tried to get really mechanized, and we went from forking the hay off the truck into the hayloft to using one of these mechanical forks that just by way of gravity drops into a layer of hay and lifts it out and then pulls it up to a track and then it goes back in the barn and the point where you want the hay, you pull a rope on the fork and down comes the hay. So I remember helping to pack hay – forking around in the barn. I think I did that later. I think my early reputation was that I was always good for a softball game, but I was hard to find on work projects. But I got into the spirit of the Work Program later on. I remember the first Thanksgiving football game, which was a marvelous athletic extravaganza.

**MEH:** What do you remember about that?

**JC:** Well, I remember Ike Nakata jumping over Faf Foster. Ike did that twice, as I recall, and then Faf stood up. That was the end of that. But it was – You know, people talk about the artists and so forth, but there were some very physically gifted people in other ways too. John Bergman and Merv Lane, Manvel

Schauffler, Dan Rice, Herb Cable, who were all good athletes too. So we had softball games that were really good games. But, that was the first time I'd ever seen games in which women were allowed to play, and even the children. We got to play too. That was almost a ritual. You'd have a softball game I think usually Sunday afternoons.

I remember a hailstorm. We had a monstrous hailstorm once, and Harry Weitzer was coming down. He was late to dinner. We happened to be out on the porch. Because it was during the summer we ate out on the screen porch. We could see out and Harry was dodging things. I mean you could not see what he was dodging. All of a sudden there was a tremendous whomp on the roof and there was a hailstorm that lasted I don't know how long, but many of the people in the Studies Building had – because they had the swing-out windows – had their windows out parallel to the ground, and hailstones went right through them. One hailstone hit a corner of the Dining Hall roof and actually knocked a chip of wood off inside. But the one I remember most was one that hit Vollmer Hetherington's Crosley automobile and it made a dent in it. We went over and recovered the hailstone and weighed it in the kitchen, and it weight three-quarters of a pound. That, that was – I mean, we would get hailstorms, but that's the only one I remember. It was amazing.

I remember the hikes. Mostly I remember the hikes by hearing about them. But there were, there were hikes up to the pasture, there were hikes up to Graybeard Mountain, there were hikes to Mount Mitchell. A lot of the hikes started at night, so people would hike when it was cool and get up to

the crest of the Blue Ridge, right now west of the where the Blue Ridge Parkway crosses over – actually, west of Mount Mitchell, or south of Mount Mitchell. People would camp there and then they would hike on up to Mount Mitchell and back. I made one of those hikes, and we got up as far as the first camp, but I don't remember whether I was too young to go on or what, but I didn't make the climb to Mount Mitchell. Those were great hikes, and there were some great stories connected with those. But I only have that on report. I wasn't there for some of the hi-jinks.

I must say that I remember a lot of piano music that didn't make any sense to me. I now know it was Bach or Haydn or Mozart. But mainly what I saw in the college students was somebody to play softball with or football with.

**MEH:** What was it like to be a kid with all of these college students, in a community?

**JC:** Well, Manvel Schauffler says I was the most obnoxious eleven-year-old he ever knew, and I have it on good report that people who never sat with each other at dinner would sit with each other at dinner rather than leave a vacant chair for me to sit in. I was noisy. I ate fast. I tried to whip up a softball game as soon as dinner was finished, which for me was five minutes. I thought there were some instances where I was put in my place, but I think I was really treated pretty darn well, considering the fact that I was at the bratty stage and was probably a little more of a brat – I remember one of the most humiliating things was that I wrote in lipstick on the railing of the fence right by the bridge, right up the road from the library. I wrote "To the Dining Hall," and I spelled "dining" with two N's. It was embarrassing enough to be found out and required to remove that, but I

was mocked for not knowing how to spell "dining," and that was [LAUGHS] – it may have helped me later in my education, I'm not sure. There were occasions like that.

I once asked Ike Nakata what it was like to fire a rifle. There were a lot of veterans at Black Mountain, but I never heard one describe a combat situation. But I kept after Ike, and I had an imitation wooden M-1 Garand Rifle. He said "You want to know what it's like?" and I said "Yeah." So he said "Put it up to your shoulder," and I put it up to my shoulder. He took it, the barrel in both hands and jammed it so hard against my shoulder that it almost knocked me over and says "That's what it felt like!" So I was full of a lot of questions, and I came away feeling that I had been – my recollection is that I'd been pretty well accepted. I realized that I was hard to take, but I don't recall it as unpleasant at all. I guess I could say that nothing that might have been done or said by a student was something that I didn't deserve. Nobody, nobody mocked children or talked down to them. In the softball games, they might come close and pitch a little bit more gently so you could hit the ball. They didn't make a point of wanting to strike out the kids or anything like that. They could have felt pestered by having kids around, but we had lots of opportunities. I remember that as a very, a very rewarding experience. I have trouble relating to people who talk about a dismal childhood, even in their teenage years. That wasn't our experience. My experience.



**MEH:** During this time, your father was having a lot of problems with his nervous breakdown or whatever was happening. Did you stay at the college when he was hospitalized and away, or did you go – did your family go away?

**JC:** I don't – I wasn't aware of that during the time we were at the college. I did – After we had moved into Black Mountain, my mother called me and said "You've got to come home." I came home. My mother had talked to my father's psychiatrist and had made a reservation for him down in Morganton at the hospital, and I had to talk him into going. I was thirteen. That was tough. About the length of time, or anything that went on during that time, I don't have any recollection at all. Just that, basically telling him he needed to do this and it was okay, and riding with my mother down to Morganton. That's a part of his life that I never pried into. I think I accepted it.

**MEH:** As a child, you weren't – it was not really – it was something your parents handled, not something you were involved at that time.

**JC:** That's right. Yeah, yeah. Except that one instance, and Rob lived with my folks longer over the course of his life after that time than we did, so – Maybe Dave has some recollection. I don't think I ever particularly worried about it in the sense of being made to feel insecure or anything like that.

**MEH:** I had a hard time putting together when your father was at the college, because apparently there were times when he was away and hospitalized, but the family it seemed was there, so it was very unclear to me in going through the college papers just when he was there or why there would be sort of blanks.

**JC:** Well, I guess, again with the exception of that occurrence, I remember mostly my kid things. There were times later when he substituted at Lee Edwards in Asheville, and that Mom taught. Mom taught some – especially when the grade school got too small for the student population, they moved up to the Baptist Retreat Ground up at Ridgecrest. They had several sections up there and she taught a fifth grade section up there. But gosh, I don't – It was not made to seem like a big trauma, so –

**MEH:** Are there other adults that you remember at Black Mountain?

**JC:** Other than students?

**MEH:** [AFFIRMATIVE]. I guess students were adults to you then. The older adults.

**JC:** Well, yes. I remember Ted Dreier. I remember how athletic Ted was – not skilled at – I wouldn't say skilled at some of the sports but just very athletic. He was very – I remember that he and his wife could polka. Boy, they could polka. Gosh, he was light on his feet. Of course, I remember Cliff Moles and Ray Trayer. Molly Gregory I remember somewhat. Herbert Miller, who was the business manager and whose granddaughter I had a crush on at one point. Bill Levi, whose daughter I had a crush on at another point. Of course, I remember M.C., but I kind of – you know, you can edit this, but I kind of remember M.C. as the Wicked Witch of the West. I mean –

**MEH:** How was that?

**JC:** Well, she and my father certainly did not see eye-to-eye on relations between students and faculty, and on what was central to educational endeavor. Al Freeman, who taught history for a year or two, had been a marine historian. He

was a marksman, and he had some firearms. I was always kind of interested in firearms as a kid. Never kept the interest up, but he had a flintlock pistol and several high-powered, very accurate target shooting guns. I remember Mrs. Jalowetz. She lived right up the road from us. Of course I remember the Lowinskys somewhat but I didn't see as much of them. Josef Albers lived in the same house as Ted Dreier, and he was kind of a formidable figure I would say. I remember looking at a piece of art on his table and thinking "Well, what's that?" and then finding out it was some greatly prized work of art. So I guess one of the things that I don't remember – I mean I realize I watched people weave, I watched Anni Albers weave, and they used to take the looms out on the gravel underneath the Studies Building sometimes. I remember hearing about Ilya Bolotowsky and thinking mostly that he was a pretty eccentric guy with a cartoon moustache. [LAUGHS] Happy Hansgirg, the chemistry professor –

**MEH:** "Happy" Hansgirg you called him?

**JC:** That was the nickname he had. Happy Hangirg. He drove around in this Cadillac convertible. Was it Natasha Goldowski? Natasha once told about in the early days before the actual Revolution, when there was a lot of unrest. She told about how the servants went off to a meeting, and when the servants came back, the family who thought they'd had good relations with, relationship with their servants, said "Well what did they tell you at the meeting?" The servants said "Well they told us that what is ours is ours, and that what is yours is ours too." [LAUGHS]

Hansgirg's laboratory blew up. I'm sure they may have established the cause of the fire, but this thing went up late in the night. Of course, we had fire drills and Black Mountain had these huge canisters of chemical, soda-acid chemical, I mean they were huge, on large carts, which had to be hand drawn, and they rushed out that equipment, and the Fire Department came out. We had garden hoses, everything, but nothing adequate to fight a chemical fire. I don't remember who the student was – I was with a student and we were dragging a garden hose over to the back entrance, one of the back doors, to try and get some water on the fire and a tank of oxygen or acetylene or something blew up [LAUGHS]. It came right through the door. We were still probably fifty feet away, but it was, it was a shock. To go back later and find oh about, I don't know, a quarter to three-eighths inch cylinder torn right in half, that made an impression on me. Cliff Moles was a friend of ours all the time from the college days on until he died. He used to have a running battle with the veterans in the house right across from the back of the Dining Hall we called "the bachelors' quarters." He would come down in the tractor and decelerate, which would make this "poom poom poom poom poom poom" sound, and they would throw stuff at him. So one day he came down – he'd bring the milk down before breakfast, so he was always the first person up. One day he came down and started his tractor popping away. I forget what they were throwing at him – potatoes, or something. He had some rotten cabbage on the back of the tractor, prepared for the occasion, so there was quite an exchange of produce, and it

took the guys in the bachelors' quarters somewhat by surprise to have this stuff raining down on them – rotten cabbage.

Gosh! You know, the thing I remember about Bucky Fuller is that I climbed on his model of the geodesic dome, which made him madder than heck, and I did see him around. I remember one year we had an Indian dancer named Vashi who was pretty exotic for North Carolina. Of course I saw Merce Cunningham and John Cage and all those people, but I had no idea what they were up to. My main role when it came to concerts and things like that was to set up chairs. They had these wonderful straight-backed wicker-bottom chairs, and we used to see how many we could line up and push across the Dining Hall floor to get them in position for the concerts. If you really got good, you could not only push fifteen or sixteen of these chairs in a line, but you could turn the line too – up to a point. So, I would help set up the Dining Hall for concerts and then I either went home or fell asleep in the front row, or something like that. When I think back to all the people who were there, and all the great things that were going on, I saw very little of it. I don't remember concerts in detail. There were lots of string quartets. I remember they had a very well-known quartet in one summer, and started a football game. Saw they were out there and I threw a ball at one of the guys and he caught it and threw it back, and I forget all the byplay. But basically he was the first violinist. [LAUGHS] He'd also, as I remember, been the starting quarterback for Harvard. But he elected not to play catch more than just that once, I suppose thinking that he didn't want to ruin a violin performance for the sake of a game of catch.

So I have impressions of a lot of the adults. Chris Noland, who was the nurse – she was a student – and her – this would be her husband and brother-in-law, Harry and Ken Noland. I remember George and Cornelia, Malrey in the kitchen, and I don't remember what my feelings were about black people. I think growing up in Winnetka, we had a very Northern liberal outlook. I never at any time ever felt – I don't think I felt prejudiced. I probably accepted prejudice, I mean I didn't stand up and say "This is wrong." But George and Cornelia were just wonderful to us kids, and Malrey, and Malrey's grandson, A.C., Alvin Charles Few. Neat kid. Terrific marble player. I remember one year we had a really bad flood, and we had to link together on a rope and go down to what was frankly described as the servants' quarters and get George and Cornelia and Malrey out of there. I think the water was maybe three or four feet deep, which would have been enough. Those houses were on rock foundations, but if it had gotten any higher, it might have been enough to sweep the houses off the foundation. So to me it was a great romantic rescue that I was allowed to get on that rope and go down and help out in that.

**MEH:** Where were the service quarters located?

**JC:** Well they were down, let's see, it would be to the south of the main campus. If you know – I can't remember the line-up of dormitories, but you had the stone house –

**MEH:** You had the two lodges.

**JC:** The North College [Lodge] and South College [Lodge]. You head out to the east you had the tennis courts and the gatehouse. The servants' quarters were

down to the southeast. I think they were other houses that had been started and maybe with more elaborate design in mind that were finished. I don't remember ever being in them. They looked like – Well, I can't say that I remember how they looked. I think they were good houses. They were on stone foundations. But that's where George and Cornelia and Malrey lived.

**MEH:** Where did you live?

**JC:** We lived in Meadows Inn. If you went up past the Studies Building and up the road to where the road crossed the creek. If you went straight ahead for a short distance, you were at the shop. If you crossed the creek, the first house on the right was – I don't remember the name of it, but it was where the Dreiers and the Albers lived. Then up the hill from that, off the main road, was Meadows Inn. It was a – now you would call it a duplex. Big house. It had three bedrooms, a kitchen, a bath, and a living room, which ran the whole width of the house, and a big stone fireplace in it. Upstairs you had another whole set of rooms – or a whole apartment. I think when we first lived in Meadows Inn, the Dehns – Max Dehn and his wife – lived up there. Then later Howard Rondthaler's father, Theodore Rondthaler and Alice, lived up there. Howard was in the navy at the time. Katherine, I think, was there for a year or so and then went off to college. But Rondy was upstairs most of the time, Rondy Senior. It was a great house. The fireplace we used – We used it a lot to heat the house. There was a coal furnace in the basement and you could heat it, you know, in severe weather we'd use the furnace. But a lot of time we would take maple that we cut up toward the pasture, and we would roll the blocks of maple

down the hill from up above Last Chance and The Bloody Bucket up there, and roll it right up boards, up the steps of Meadows Inn and right in the double doors of Meadows Inn and into the fireplace. You'd build a big fire around it and the log would smolder all night. You'd leave the draft open and it would keep the house warm and then you'd throw small wood in around it the next day and it would all light up. I don't remember how long it took to burn a big log, but you could get by three or four days. Once we did the chimney. I just saw the – just found the picture of our cleaning the chimney. We decided we had too much coal soot in the chimney, so my brother and I got up on the roof and we put bricks in a burlap sack. We had a neat stack of bricks, and so we lowered them down on a rope down the chimney and started reaming out the chimney. The bricks got out of alignment, so for a short time we had our bag of bricks stuck in the chimney, but finally managed to get that sorted out and get them out. I don't remember ever doing the chimney sweep duties again. It was great adventure and I've got a picture of us sitting – Dave and I – sitting up there. John Wallen we saw quite a bit of. His son, Kurt, was – gosh, I don't know, close to my age. Kim and Anne were younger, and they were playmates of Rob's. I think John Wallen and my father had a lot in common. I think. So I'd see John around a lot.

**MEH:** Did you ever go into Asheville or Black Mountain? Do you have any particular – Well, of course you went to Black Mountain to school.

**JC:** Until we went to high school – and then we weren't living on the campus – I don't really remember that much about Black Mountain. The only trip to Asheville I remember was going in with somebody, it might have been Dave



Schauffler, in his – I'll get in trouble – Model A or Model T convertible, with a rumble seat. We were allowed to sit in the rumble seat. He went down one of the streets in Asheville that's a little bit like the streets in San Francisco, where it was a steep enough hillside so that the cross streets were level. So you went down, level, down, level. He hit one of those too fast and we came flying up and I know that I bruised both of my knees inside, hitting the inside of the rumble seat compartment. That's my only Asheville memory that I can connect directly to Black Mountain College. I also remember Bud Merrick. Bud and my father were good friends, and we played a lot with Bud's kids. They lived on what was then called the State Test Farm, which was down across from the V.A. Hospital, and I think it had been or was the experiment station farm, so they were growing demonstration crops and so forth. But it was in the Swannanoa School District so Bud and Kate's children went to Swannanoa schools and we went to Black Mountain schools. I remember an ill-fated fishing trip, which happened after Bud left the college, and he went to work for the Forest Service in the Southeast Experiment Station as editor for their publications. He and my father and Dick Roberts and I don't remember who the fourth one was – maybe there was just the three of them – decided to take a fishing trip to the North Harper River and so we all went off. Dave and I went along. The second most memorable part about that trip for me was the fact that we had gotten jungle hammocks, and so we were going to sleep in the jungle hammocks and be safe from the mosquitoes. Well, the jungle hammock was designed as the original weight-loss torture chamber, and even with the mosquito netting, the sides

open, it was hot, and they were made out rubber, you know. It was just awful. We barely slept. But the next morning – They hadn't had any luck fishing either – and the next morning – we did this on a weekend – we were walking out, Dave and I, and we encountered two men, both of whom were packing pistols, and one of them had a deputy sheriff's badge or a uniform or something that made it clear they were law enforcement. They said "Well, howdy, boys. Whatcha been adoin'?" We said "Oh we've been with my dad and his friends." "Well whatcha doing?" "Well, they're fishing." "Oh, is that right?" [LAUGHS] "Where are they?" We said "Well, they're down the trail a bit." So we walked back up to the car and then lo and behold, here fifteen or twenty minutes later come my father and Dick Roberts, and Bud Merrick, and the law enforcement. It turns out that Bud Merrick thought since they were fishing on National Forest land, they didn't need a fishing license. Well, at that time you didn't need a fishing license if you were on National Park land, but the National Forest game rules are administered by the State Game Commission. So we had been fishing illegally, and what's more, they hadn't caught anything. But that didn't make any difference. We were hauled before a Justice of the Peace on Sunday morning and fined fourteen dollars. This is 1947. Fourteen dollars for fishing illegally. I don't recall my father ever going fishing again when he was at Black Mountain College.

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

**MEH:** Do you have any particular memories of mealtime at the college – besides eating fast and wanting to play ball?

**JC:** Well, it's hard to tell – There are things, stories that I've heard, that I may or may not have witnessed, but the things that I remember – For instance, I remember Mush Day. There was a push on to save food for starving Europeans and so forth. So on Sunday night the food would be set out after lunch, and there'd be crackers and bread. I don't know whether – it may be Mush Day replaced a regular meal. But anyway, there was an occasion, and it got to be once a week, where we would eat cornmeal mush instead of the full drill. I also remember Thanksgiving dinner. They used to have Thanksgiving dinner, and they would set tables, four or five, end to end and put around thirty people at a table, and a faculty member would carve and serve. I remember that the first Thanksgiving my father never got any turkey because by the time he'd served thirty people, the twenty-nine others were ready to start over again [LAUGHS] on seconds. So my mother learned to get turkey for him at the start and then they would take it home and eat it after Thanksgiving dinner, and that way he could carve to his heart's delight and they could still have Thanksgiving dinner. I remember the serving trays – big aluminum oval trays. The trick was to see how much you could carry on a tray, particularly after dinner. People would just load those trays to the gills. I mean stacks of dishes. I remember that once I was so much in a hurry to get a softball game going, and I thought I would help out. So I went to pour coffee and I either hit the edge of somebody's chair or bumped somebody with my elbow and spilled coffee down the back of some student, who was just outraged – particularly because it was I who did it. [LAUGHS] I can't say that I remember all the discussion. I really enjoyed eating

at the Dining Hall, though. The food was good, as far as I was concerned, and it was just a very animated place. It was animated. There was noise all the time. People were always talking. I remember working on the dish crew. Everybody had a job. When it was working right, we had a work coordinator and everybody had a job. Some people policed the grounds and some people did the dishes and some people helped in the kitchen and some people helped on the farm. I remember how much fun it was to pitch in and work on the dish crew. A lot of people didn't like it, but the college got a surplus army dishwasher. It never worked correctly. It was supposed to have a tractor feed. You'd just put the tray on and it would go slowly through and be in the right length of time and come out the other side. That never worked. So the trick was to load a tray of dishes and shove it in under the curtain. It would shove the other tray out so you could get it, because the water was hotter than the dickins. That was always great fun. I mean there was great clatter and animation and excitement about it. We, as I say, we took most of our meals in the Dining Hall for six years.

**MEH:** Did you ever have any encounters with snakes at the college?

**JC:** Oh, yes, although none that I ever considered particularly threatening. I was more naive about snakes, or maybe more realistic about snakes – I don't know which. But you would, you would encounter rattlesnakes in the woods – Well, I have to be very careful about this, because when I was living in North Carolina, I did have encounters with rattlesnakes and that was primarily when I was hiking with my father. So I'd have to think really hard about whether I remember from that period specifically encountering a snake. I sure remember hearing a

lot of students, especially the young women, being frightened by snakes. I remember a young woman named Alice Steer (?). Alice was with some students and they encountered a snake and killed it. Alice skinned it and made a belt cover out of it. But I remember being on the lookout for snakes. I don't remember anybody at Black Mountain actually being bitten by a snake. Now it may have happened, but during the time I was there I don't remember anybody ever being bitten by a snake. There were rattlesnakes and copperheads, though.

**MEH:** You graduated from Black Mountain High School?

**JC:** Yes.

**MEH:** And at that point, your father had left the college and he was living – where were you living?

**JC:** He moved to Chicago the year I graduated from Black Mountain High School. In fact I worked in Black Mountain that summer, the summer of 1954, at a resort hotel, the Monte Vista and went off to Wesleyan University. I don't remember whether it was the first call I got or – but very soon after I got up there, I got a call from Chicago saying "We're in Chicago. We've moved back to Chicago." At that point I think my father had gotten a job at Roosevelt University. It happened just like that. I had no idea. In fact, at Christmastime, the end of my first semester in college, I took the bus home and I went by way of Black Mountain, just to see my schoolmates. I was in Black Mountain once, I think, after that, and I can't remember whether it was 1956 or '57. Then while I was at Wesleyan, one of my Black Mountain classmates, who was attending a

workshop or something at Union Theological Seminary, came up and visited me. I think that's the first time that subway riders in New York had heard gospel music, but we sang gospel trios on the subway train. Then I went back to Black Mountain, gosh, it'd be hard to say. Went back several times with our children, when we lived in Connecticut, our two older daughters. But I don't think I saw one of my high school classmates between 1956 and 1986.

**MEH:** Did you graduate from Wesleyan?

**JC:** I did.

**MEH:** In what field?

**JC:** History. I spent a little over two years at the University of Chicago Law School. Was not an apt law student. Went to work for the Forest Service.

**MEH:** Where was that?

**JC:** Out here. Out in – southeast of Portland. I worked in the Forest Service from 1956 on – in the summers. I worked for the Forest Service for four years, worked on the first Job Corps staff in a Forest Service-run Job Corps Center in Oregon, beginning in 1965, and then in the fall of 1966, I was offered a job at Wesleyan as Director of Annual Giving.

**MEH:** This is 1956, or –

**JC:** 1966. I've been doing some kind of fundraising ever since.

**MEH:** So you moved back to Connecticut?

**JC:** Went back to Connecticut until July of, or June of '69, and then Marvel Schaufli, with whom I'd kept in touch – I'd seen him summers – invited me to come out to be the Director of Development for the Catlin Gabel School in

Portland, and I was there eleven years. Then I was offered a position at the Fountain Valley School in Colorado Springs. We were there for six years. Then an opening that I had applied for at the Bush School here in Seattle came open again, and I took that job and was there for four years. I've been with Bethany of the Northwest, which is a Lutheran nursing and housing not-for-profit corporation, for seven years.

**MEH:** What is the Bush School? Manvel taught there.

**JC:** Yes [OVERTALK]. Yes, private, K through 12. Another one of those schools started by an enterprising woman who said, you know, "I'm as smart as any man and as able." [LAUGHS] She started the Bush School, and originally they had elementary grades and then girls in the high school. They had girls in the high school until, oh, gosh, I don't know, the middle sixties I think. Then went co-ed, and it's a school of between five and six hundred kids. It's right over here in Madison Park, about ten minutes away. When we moved here in 1986, our main criteria were that we didn't want to be too far from the school and we didn't want to cross a bridge, because even then the bridges were notorious for getting tied up by traffic. So we had settled here. Our youngest daughter had one year in high school, and we didn't want her to have a long commute. So, as I say, it's about ten minutes for us from here, and it's been a good location. It's fifteen minutes or so to the airport, fifteen minutes to the downtown.

**MEH:** Has anyone besides you or Schauf been associated with the Bush School of the Black Mountain crowd?

**JH:** Aaaaah! Gosh. He would know better than I. I can't think of anybody except my brother Rob.

**MEH:** Did Rob teach there?

**JH:** Rob has taught at Bush for twenty-five years. He graduated from Middlebury, went into the Peace Corps, had to get out of Ethiopia when the revolution started. Worked as a Vista Volunteer, took a graduate degree at the University of Chicago. Then he lived with us for a short time in Portland when I was at Catlin Gabel. Then he moved to Seattle in 1973 and took the job at Bush. He's been teaching middle school at Bush for twenty five years.

**MEH:** Does he teach a general class or does he teach a particular –

**JH:** Usually history and geography. He has an M.A. from the University of Chicago in geography and he coaches cross country. I don't know, but I think he really started the program at Bush and it's had some good skiers, some great skiers, as a matter of fact. So, I had known about Bush for years, and I had done evaluations at Bush. I did evaluations of the development staff when I was at Catlin Gabel. I knew the headmaster. The headmaster was a man who in many ways was like Schauf in his views of education and the value of experience in education. So, I was attracted by that and ironically the first year that an opening came, I had already signed a contract in Colorado. So, then two years later it came up and I went there. That was Les's last year at Bush. He thought he was going to retire but he ended up not retiring. However, that was his last year at Bush. The administration changed. So, when I was interviewed at Bethany, I was brought in by a consultant who was doing the search for them. I



was talking to the search committee and they said “ Well, what besides –“ because I had talked to them about the fact that as a Lutheran I liked the idea of working for a Lutheran organization and not having to hide my religion, not that Bethany – Bethany is nonsectarian when it comes to admissions so that you have all kinds of people, but you have a different outlook on caring for people in a church-based organization, I think. I appreciated that aspect of it and several other things. They said, “Well, are there any other reasons that you like this job?’ and I said “Yes. I’m about to become an unemployed fund raiser.” And the consultant looked at everybody in the room and said, “Just like a consultant.” [LAUGHS] So, I think – I don’t know. It’s hard to – My father was right I think about the fact that the experience that we had at Black Mountain is something people need to have.

**MEH:** In what respect/

**JH:** Well, I think the – certainly living in Black Mountain, living in that area, living among people who were very much oriented – I mean, the community outside of Black Mountain had very fundamental values. Certainly religiously they did. In terms of work, in terms of integrity and maybe looking a little more closely at what was important, something that I’m sure he didn’t think we’d get living in a suburb of Chicago all our lives, particularly an affluent suburb. Whether he thought that up later or whether he thought that all along, I don’t know. But in hindsight it certainly was true. I think the Black Mountain experience – what I thought was that it taught me something about valuing everybody, dealing with different kinds of people. The tremendous, tremendous range of people. You

could take the difference between – well, I don't know if that's valid. But somebody like Ray Trayer and somebody like Bill Levi. Ray Trayer was a passivist who punched out Bill Levi in a faculty meeting. He thought Bill Levi was basically delivering a line of crap. But you had all of those kinds of people and in a Black Mountain setting you were free basically to relate to anybody. Obviously, there were people who didn't get along. You found that out. However, for me, as a kid, I was probably less sensitive to a lot of the personality differences in the faculty and so forth. But for me being able to take part in the games with the students and work with the students and so forth you really had some sense of pulling your own load and valuing people for who they were. I've often thought that despite the fact that the art of Black Mountain has gotten most of the attention, I think people have overlooked the societal viewpoints that were important there. I mean the attitude of not just making people prove themselves but helping people prove themselves. When I got to college, I went to a college that had a lot of preppies and people who were not only better prepared but smarter than I was. But I think my experience at Black Mountain helped me relate to everybody and anybody and I think that made a lot of difference in the quality of my college experience. I look at a lot of the people that I know from Black Mountain who are just good people. I think that makes a difference and I think that sometimes in the evidences that Black Mountain has left, the other things have not been as well – perhaps as well – documented because they really are intangible. But it was certainly for me, as I say – I have no regrets whatsoever. I can't imagine having a better childhood.

**MEH:** Two other questions. You referred to Last Chance and the Red Bucket .–

**JH:** The Bloody Bucket.

**MEH:** What's the Bloody Bucket? There was Last Chance and Next to the Last Chance.

**JH:** Well, I think the Bloody Bucket was the name given to it before it was Next to the Last Chance. It was the other of those prefabs. Schauf has told me how it got that name, but I don't remember. When the war ended, they had all these prefabs around and so the college went in for prefabs in a big way. They built a new library out of a prefab and they built those two dormitories up there. I don't know what else. But that was how I knew it: as Last Chance and the Bloody Bucket.

**MEH:** Did you attend church when you were at Black Mountain?

**JH:** No. Not until after I left the college. Every once in a while – well, I don' – My father was the son of a Methodist minister and my mother was raised a Congregationalist but I don't think that – I don't remember in the time that we lived at the college ever going to church. I may have gone in the Quiet House once or twice, more out of curiosity than anything else. I actually started going to church because of a woman I was dating in high school. She quit going to the church and I just kept going because I liked singing in the choir, and my religious faith sort of fluctuated and ebbed and flowed until after I met my wife. Lutheran – very few Lutherans marry somebody and become something else. It usually works the other way. But I have no real sense – I'm sure that they may have had a moment of silence but I can't remember for sure at the start of

dinner. It was not a high priority for anybody that I knew, although then again there were a lot of parts of people's lives that I didn't know about. Despite what some of them thought, I wasn't with the students twenty-four hours a day.

**MEH:** Do you have any materials from the college like photographs?

**JH:** I have a number of photographs, mostly of kids. I don't know if I have any photos – I have some adults like the Rondthalers and the Merricks. But we've looked through the stuff that we got from my parents and I didn't come up with a lot of pictures of Black Mountain students.

**MEH:** Where are your father's papers?

**JH:** My brother has my father's papers. David.

**MEH:** Were you aware when you were living in the village of the work your father was doing on the Indians?

**JH:** Yes, I was. We traveled a lot when we were in high school and we used to go out into the Nantahala Mountains and into the Smokies and into the Balsam Mountains and he knew all that lore. You'd see a roadside historical sign that talked about this Indian encounter or that Indian encounter, and I didn't understand the depth of his scholarship but I knew – I mean, he had a marvelous arrowhead collection and it was all basically picked up by him or given to him by students or faculty members or by friends from Asheville who knew of his interests.

**MEH:** Does the family still have that?

**JC:** I don't. Whether Dave or Rob has it, I'm not sure.

**MEH:** Can you put your finger on the photographs now? Is that easy?

**JC:** I can. They're awfully small.

**MEH:** That's ok. Now I'm really expanding beyond the arts into a much broader area and I'm really – The way I'm going to do these interviews, I can scan photos in and use them so even a little snapshot can be scanned in. So if I can just hold them in front of the camera and record them with an ID, then if you could even just put them down on a photocopy machine and make copies and send them to me that gives me a record to work with.

**JC:** OK.

**MEH:** When you mentioned the one about cleaning the chimney, I thought good, maybe he will look for the photos.

[General discussion not transcribed]

**JC:** [Photo 1] The North Fork Valley and north toward Mount Mitchell. Mount Mitchell is not in the picture, but the wall across the front of that valley or the head of that valley – I can't remember the name of it, but the Blue Ridge Parkway runs across there now.

**MEH:** And you said that's your father, Rob and Rondy's dog.

**JC:** Right.

**MEH:** [Photo 2] Your father and Rob at Toxaway Falls.

**JC:** Yeah. Which is down by Sylva, North Carolina. Well, here's one

**MEH:** [Photo 3] This is Dave Corkran.

**JC:** David Corkran, Jr.

**MEH:** He was a Junior.

**JC:** My brother is David H. Corkran, III and he made sure that his son would not be named David H. Corkran, IV.

**MEH:** [Photo 4] That's a good picture. [John?, Rob, David and Marion] [John we did not identify this on tape. Is that you on the left?]

**JC:** I don't know how many of these you want to see,

**MEH:** [Photo 5] This is Dave and Rob. How old were you when Rob was born/

**JC:** Let's see. I was seven, I think.

**MEH:** Your sister was younger than you.

**JC:** My sister was the oldest.

**MEH:** She was the oldest.

**JC:** She was ten I think when she was killed.

**MEH:** [Photo 6] Marion Corkran, John, Rob on John's shoulders, Dave, III. And the dog.

**JC:** Rondy's dog.

**MEH:** That's one of the houses in the background

**JC:** Yeah. That's Meadows Inn where we lived.

**MEH:** Good.

**JC:** [Photo 7] Diane Moles and the Trayer's daughter. I think I got that right.

**MEH:** Rob, One of the Wallen's kids, Diane Moles, and –

**JC:** Ray Trayer's daughter.

**MEH:** Look at those cars in the background. Cars date more than anything else. This is my generation here.

[Photo 8] You say that's Rob and a Wallen.

**JC:** Yes.

[Photo 9] That's the farm in the background but I don't know who that is with the stone boat.

**MEH:** What would that flat bed be used for?

**JC:** It's a stone boat. You'd load stones on it and drag them out of the fields.

[Photo 10] I think that's a Trayer and then Rob and Diane and I bet its Kurt Wallen sitting on the bench.

**MEH:** I think so.

**JC:** That's in the front yard at Meadows Inn.

**MEH:** Being a kid had to be fun at Black Mountain. Just to have your playmates, to eat in the dining hall with adults.

**JC:** Oh, yeah. Down there between Meadows Inn and the farm, right off to the right of where these pictures were taken, there's a stream, quite a deep cut. There's a path that went down across the stream and there were big trees down in the bottom. We had a beech tree that was just huge. Of course back in the days before anybody worried about what it did, we nailed rungs into the tree. We'd climb thirty or forty feet off the ground. Then we built a tree house out of spare lumber . I don't know whether it was spare but we spared it from the Studies Building. Unfortunately, it was hardwood so it was very hard to nail because it would split. So the treehouse was a little bit rickety. There were grape vines big enough for kids to swing on.

[Photo 11] There's the front yard again. What a crowd this is. That would be Wallen, Moles and Corkran.

[Photo 12] I don't know who all the people are here. There are a couple of Wallens in there. I don't know whether.

**MEH:** That is a crew building something.

**JC:** Yeah. I think it's a play structure.

**MEH:** It looks like everybody's coloring or drawing. It's some kind of structure.

**JC:** There we go.

**MEH:** I think everybody's coloring, painting.

**JC:** [Photo 13] I bet we can tell who it is now. I bet you can identify them from this next picture because I don't know where – I bet this is down by the servant's



quarters. Or maybe they had – because look at all the black kids. I don't know if one of them is A.C. or not. That is Kurt Wallen and that is Kim Wallen.

**MEH:** Point now.

**JC:** That's Kurt Wallen, I'm pretty sure. Kim Wallen. [IRRELEVANT COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

**MEH:** [Photo 14] Was he [Robin] born at Black Mountain or before you got there?

**JC:** Just before. He was born – I have trouble getting it all straight – but I think he was born in December of '43. We moved to Black Mountain in the summer of '44.

**MEH:** [Photo 15] It was on standby so you are going to have to start all over again.

**JC:** Katherine Ronthaler, my brother Dave, then I, then Theodore Ronthaler, Estelle Levi, Alice Rondthaler and Rob and Bobbie's boyfriend [right to left]. I don't know if he was a student or somebody back from wherever.

**MEH:** That's an interesting photo. You got a lot of people in there.

**JC:** [Photo 16] This is the infamous chimney sweep battalion. That's I and that's Dave. That's Meadows Inn.

[Photo 17] This is down at the State Test Farm. This is yours truly, Susan Merrick, Austin Merrick and Dave.

**MEH:** So you were all about the same age.

**JC:** Yeah. I think Susan Merrick is about my age and Austin is about Dave's age. And Kim was a year or two older. Maybe more. Maybe three years older.

[Photo 18] There we are. The football playing triumvirate. Somebody gave me a pair of old Knute Rockne type football pants which I of course wore. So there's Dave, there I am, there's Rob.

**MEH:** That's a good picture of the three of you. Were you still at Black Mountain then?

**JC:** Yes. That was a great winter. I don't know how many winters we had like that but we [TECHNICAL COMMENTS]

[Photo 19] That's one more winter scene with myself and Rob. Dave getting licked by the dog.

[Photo 20] Kept in contact with Shirley.

**MEH:** Is she still living?

**JC:** Yes, she is.

**MEH:** This is you and Shirley Moles.

**JC:** Yes.

**MEH:** Do you have her address?

**JC:** We do. Yes. She's still living in Shenandoah, Iowa.

**MEH:** [Photo 21] Start all over again.

**JC:** I want to start here. Laurel graduated from Sarah Lawrence and worked as a waitress and was training to be a midwife and was ready to start her last three months of training when she died. Carol is the teacher turned horse trainer turned massage therapist. Tim is a teacher. Carol lives in Maine. Tim lives in San Francisco and teaches at the Katherine Burke School. This is Susan, our second, and she is studying to be a nurse. She is married and she and her

husband and our grandson Jasper live in Rhode Island. That was taken at  
Tim's commencement at Wesleyan.

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**