Interviewee: EMIL WILLIMETZ
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]
[AUDIOTAPE ONLY SECTION BEGINS]

EW: If you want to, if you want to. She speaks in Spanish and in English. She's completely bilingual (My grandchild Andrea Willimetz).

MEH Has she spent time in Peru? Do your sons still have a connection to Peru?

EW: Well, her mother is Peruvian. So, Jamie speaks to Andrea in English, and her mother speaks to her in Spanish—all day long. At Christmas they spend a month in Peru, where everybody speaks Spanish, and she goes to a daycare center at the UN where everybody speaks English. Then she comes to Maine where people speak English, but some people will speak—her mother, and grandmother came up this summer for a week. So, she's bi- — And she also speaks a little Japanese, no? Right? Yeah. She can say "yes."

MEH: What can you say in Japanese?

CHILD: [SPEAKS JAPANESE] Hai.

EW: Thank you. "Hai," which is "Yes." And "Arigato" which is "Thank you."

CHILD: Arigato.

EW: Okay, well, we can have her disappear. [AUDIOTAPE ONLY SECTION ENDS] [Irrelevant discussion about camera setup not transcribed]

EW: I did all my filming, almost all my filming with a handheld camera, in Peru. I had a very heavy combat, Bell and Howell combat camera made of iron and had a three-lens turret that you just turned. It was so heavy, that as long as my wrist held up it was very steady. I would put it against my forehead and film and never used a tripod, because I'd film mostly alone. I didn't have a crew, at first, the first five or six years and then we started to build our company and got a little more elite, and—with tripods and a crew member and so on. But not the early days.

I was there thirteen years and had lots of Peace Corps volunteer friends, and they always came down with the most hideous amoebas and, like your friend with the stomach pump, I never got anything.

MEH: Never got any of that?

EW: The major reason was that the first day practically I was there, another filmmaker clued me in about taking arsenic. Whenever I had eaten something that was poor, I knew was bad, before I went to bed I would take a pill, an arsenic pill, it was put out by Squibb. Never had anything. Never had any problems.

MEH: That's interesting. I hope you didn't take a lot of the pills, you didn't eat a lot of bad food.

EW: No, no, no. I was judicious [LAUGHS]. It may, of course, it may have burned up a lot of brain cells but nobody notices that.

MEH: Maybe that's why you have a hearing aid.

EW: Right, to keep what little brains I have left from pouring out.

MEH: This is Emil Willimetz, and this is August 19th, 1997, and it's Tuesday in Cushing, Maine. Emil, how did you come to be at Black Mountain?

EW: Do you really want the story? Well, in high school, in the Bronx, it was Depression, 1936, and I had no hope of going to a regular college and paying a fee. We had a big argument in the library one time, Black Mountain versus Antioch. I thought in Antioch you could work your way through. They had that work program. I was, of course, entirely mistaken. You can't work your way through on the work program. But my friend had read the Louis Adamic article, and he was all in favor of Black Mountain. We had this argument, and we got thrown out of the library for making too much noise. So, it stayed in my, my head, you know.

I read the Louis Adamic article, and when I graduated from high school in '36, I decided to go south. I'm a Bronx boy. We shook a lot of cans for the Scottsboro boys and Angelo Hernan [Albano?] and all the big lynching cases in the South, and I wanted to see it for myself. So, I took off hitchhiking. On the road map I saw the village of Black Mountain, and I decided, well, maybe I ought to go up and say hello and look at it. Just outside of—can't think of the name of the town—but anyway near, near the Blue Ridge, where you go up the mountain—

MEH: Was it Swannanoa?

EW: No, no. No, the other direction. I was coming from Statesville. And, anyway, I was standing at a gas station, one bright morning, and a car pulled up, a roadster with a rumble seat, with six camp counselor girls in white shorts and white uniforms. Three in the rumble seat, three in the front, and right by where I was hitchhiking. I kidded them, that here is a boy from the Bronx, and I bet you wouldn't give me a ride, would you. You know, that kind of stuff. And they were saying, "Well, you

know, gee, we're sorry," and so forth. But when they got back in the car, they gave me the middle rumble seat. One of the smaller girls sat in my lap. I was in heaven.

But when we got to that road, up to Blue Ridge—in the old days it was just a two-line highway and it went like a snake, back and forth, back and forth. That little girl in my lap became a hundred pound sack of cement, and my legs started to go to sleep. By the time we got to Black Mountain, they were going all the way to Chattanooga, and I was going to go all the way with them, but by the time we got to the village of Black Mountain, I thought, well, I wouldn't be able to take it. So, I said goodbye to them, and I got a ride on the bread truck going up to Blue Ridge.

Ted Dreier was there and a few students from Rollins. I talked to them, and Ted asked me if I wanted a job. They were building a pasture fence for the horse they had in a little farm down below there. I said, "Sure," you know, "Great!" Twenty cents an hour, ten hour day, I was getting a couple dollars a day. That was pretty good for 1936. I slept in the old barn, which was falling apart. The good part of the barn was where the horse stayed in the stall. So I slept right outside the stall in the hay and worked on the fence. I was there for a couple weeks, and the fence was finished. They had invited me up occasionally for dinner—Ted and—what was his wife's name?

MEH: Bobbie.

EW: Bobbie, yeah. She's a sweetheart.

Anyway, so when I left, Ted said, "Well, would you like to apply for a scholarship?" I said, "Well, sure, but you know there's a ten dollar matriculation fee or something." Well, that was a lot of hours on that fence, you know. But I decided, okay. I stayed up half the night debating it with the horse. We finally agreed that I still had excess money that I didn't think I would have. So, I put down the ten dollars and wrote an application. I spent the summer in North Carolina, and hiked in the Smokies, went over to Tennessee and Norris Dam, Harlan County. I wanted to see the coal miners.

Then I hurried home, because I thought, well, there might be a scholarship waiting for me. Didn't hear a word. All winter I didn't hear a word, and in May—My uncle, who was a waiter in the Hotel New Yorker, spent the summers in Europe at the key spas, waiting on tables. So, he invited me to go with him as a bus boy. I was applying for my passport when I got a letter from Ted saying that the academic part had been approved. Now the financial committee had to see if there was money. So, I decided I couldn't go to Europe. I had to hang around. I spent the summer on Mount Washington as a waiter. In August, I got the okay. Just two weeks before I had to be there.

So, I hurried home and took the Greyhound down to Black Mountain, and that's how I got there.

MEH: Did you have any particular interest at the time?

EW: Yes, I wanted to be a writer. I did a lot of hitchhiking. I started hitchhiking when I was about thirteen, and so I had, you know, some interesting experiences as a kid. I wrote a write-up of one of the trips for my high school magazine. My

teacher sent it in to the Columbia Press—what is it, Journalists' Association? Anyway, it's a nationwide journalistic contest for high school kids with stories and articles and poems. I won first prize with my article. So, of course, then I was a writer. I'd never thought of it before, and then I thought, well, gee, you know, I'm a writer. I'm sure that had some influence in getting a scholarship. So, I enrolled in John Rice's class.

MEH: Going back to the Antioch-Black Mountain debate in the library, do you remember what the issues were?

EW: Well, the main issue, of course, for me was I thought that they had a work program, where I could earn enough money. I wasn't deep into the philosophy of education. My friend was more than I was, and he was very convincing. Black Mountain philosophy was advanced and was really great compared to a New York City high school. We had a principal who was a real German and a disciplinarian, not very well liked by the student body. My graduating class was eleven hundred. The high school was six thousand and a school with fifty-five students was something that really raised our eyebrows. I became convinced that Black Mountain was a great idea.

EW: And you arrived in the fall, in September.

EW: '36—no, it was a year later, '37. So, it was the school year of '37-'38, '38-'39, '39-'40. I only went three years. My last year was not very successful. I was in hot water because of the War—I was expelled from high school for leading an anti-war strike in 1936. We had one in '35, '36. It was mainly a college thing. The League Against War and Fascism, the American Student Union (ASU). About a

million college students went on strike. Very few high schools did, but we did, and we pulled out 350 students. My principal didn't like it, and he told us that none of us would graduate. He wouldn't sign our diplomas. But we petitioned the Board of Education in New York. I have newspaper clippings if you're interested in any details. So, as a result, he was forced to sign my diploma. But on two of the students for some reason or other—I can't remember the details—he still dragged his feet, and the main speaker at our graduation refused to speak, and the auditorium was full of cops. I mean, it was really very hectic.

MEH: It sounds like it.

EW: Somebody got up in the balcony and protested, and two detectives grabbed him and took him down to the basement and beat him up. Fortunately for us a newspaper reporter from the Post got on the elevator and reported it, and the Post had an editorial against the cops. And so—it was well documented, and I don't have many things from the past that I've saved, but somehow that clipping survived.

MEH: It's significant. Why were you in trouble at Black Mountain before you left?

EW: Well, because I was anti-war. My first two years, at least my first year-and-a-half, I was entirely absorbed in the cultures of Black Mountain—you know, art and music and writing and literature. BMC was an isolated place and we had very little access to news. You know, there was no television in those days, and we had a couple of radios around. I guess some of the students got newspapers. But we didn't get too much

[IRRELEVANT TECHNICAL REMARKS]

So, then all of a sudden—Not all of a sudden, but—because it was building—it hit me that I was living in a fool's world. That here I was engrossed in all these great things, and the War was going to tap me on the shoulder. Since we were very active in the anti-War movement, I was scaring other kids about war. I scared myself. I think it was Mr. Wunsch who said, "Well, he's scared." Well, of course I was scared. I mean I was scared to death. And then in '39 the War hit, and that was the year that I was there but I really wasn't there. There were a lot of complaints from some of the faculty that I wasn't paying attention and I wasn't. I wasn't and I knew it, so I didn't come back the fourth year. I didn't apply.

MEH: When you came, what was the process of registering for classes? Could you just come in and take whatever you wanted?

EW: Yeah. As usual, you'd take too much. But—I don't remember. Well, you have the archives.

MEH: Some records, yes.

EW: You sent me all the students, but what I really wanted was the classes and things. I have the first year, but the second year I was there and the third year—I have a vague memory of who was there when, you know.

MEH: I don't have photocopies of all the catalogues. But I have some separate lists that I'm pulling all that stuff out because I'm getting it on my computer now. So, I can send you for each year now the faculty and the students.

EW: '37-'38 I have fuller, but what I need is the next two years, so I can orient when I knew people at the school.

MEH: I can do that. I hope you won't have to remind me. I have all that stuff out.

EW: Well, no hurry. I'd like to have it.

MEH: What, what courses did you take? Did you have an advisor?

EW: I don't remember. I took, of course, John Rice's class. I took his class also in Plato and I took Plato II. Literature. I don't know. You'll have to look it up. It's been sixty years.

MEH: What do you remember about Rice's class?

EW: Well, I was completely absorbed in it. I mean, he was fascinating, and he would read your story—and he was a good reader, so it sounded better when he read it. Then we would discuss it, criticize it, good and bad. He let the students do most of the talking, but he would put his oar in, you know, from time to time. He was writing his book, I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century. Well, Cotton Ed Smith was one of my devils, you know, in the South, like all the other—what do you call them? Demagogues. And that was his uncle he wrote about. Every once in a while he'd read one of his chapters to us, so we could get back at him, could criticize his work. So, yeah, it was very, very stimulating.

MEH: What did you think about what he was writing about Cotton Ed Smith?

EW: Well, I thought it was great. I mean, have you seen his other book? When he left Black Mountain, he wrote a book of short stories.

MEH: No, I haven't read them.

EW: Oh! I just sent it back yesterday. I should have held it. It's a little pocket book, and I can't even remember the name of it. But it's about five stories about Southern

life, mostly interracial stories. Extremely sensitive, and very well written. I have never read his I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century. I can't get a copy.

MEH: It's hard. I finally got a copy. That's one of the books that I've read that left so many visual memories, especially of his childhood growing up in the South. It's really a beautifully written book.

EW: Yeah, I'd like to—Do you know the Fiores, Mary and Joe. They live in Jefferson here, and she loaned me that other book, and I—I feel I had it a year and I felt very guilty. But, anyway, she has a copy of I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century, but somebody who's making a film on Black Mountain had borrowed it about two years ago and hadn't returned it to her.

MEH: I watch for it all the time in used bookstores, but I don't find it.

EW: I have a used book dealer nearby here, and he's excellent, and he's gotten me a lot of—He got me the army history of my division in World War II. Needless to say, I was drafted, and I went in the army. But he got me the history of it. As a soldier I had no idea what was happening around me. I knew the hole I was in and that was it. Every once in a while we'd see a copy of an army newspaper. I can't remember what it was called. Anyway, strategically, you know, the course of the War was something that really didn't concern us very much. What concerned us was how fast Russia was coming across Europe and how many divisions they were tying up that we didn't have to fight.

So, I have a tremendous thirst now, you see, to get the history of the division, which, of course, is a ludicrous story. I mean it's full of vainglory action, which I know better. But at least I had the sequence of events for the first time.

MEH: So, going back to Black Mountain, how, how do you remember Rice as a person in the community?

EW: Well I, I had no problem with him. To some students he was caustic. You know how caustic he could be. But he never was with me personally. I think the third, the last year, where he was on his outs, I think he may have said some things about me, about my not writing. But personally I enjoyed knowing him, I was fascinated by him. When he was in exile in Folly Beach, I went with Jane and Leslie and some of the other students down to visit him in his exile. And, so, I, you know, I felt very close to him, and I always admired him. I always hated his sarcasms. I thought he cut his own throat with the rest of the faculty. So, when they had a chance to jump on him, they certainly did.

MEH: They reciprocated.

EW: Yeah.

MEH: Were you involved with Schawinsky's drama productions?

EW: I wore a set of underwear in his Danse Macabre, but I wasn't involved. Sunley is the guy that talked about that. Sunley was my roommate the first year, and about thirty years later—he was living in Long Island—I attended a lecture by Buckminster Fuller at the Unitarian Church, and somebody tapped me on the shoulder. He said he recognized the back of my head. [LAUGHS] I didn't know I had a back of a head so different from anybody else, but he recognized it. So, we got to see each other more often. But, no, I, I read about it in your book.

MEH: What do you remember about the Danse Macabre production?

EW: Well, just, just the costuming. I was very involved in the print shop, and spent a good deal of my time there. I was very shy, and I never dreamt that I would be in a play. And I was in several plays because you had to be in order to put them on. There weren't enough bodies at Black Mountain. So, I was in the Danse Macabre but only as a figure in costume, and somebody would tell me what to do. But it wasn't very much. I'm not a good source for the Danse Macabre [LAUGHS].

MEH: What about the print shop? You were involved with that, weren't you?

EW: Yeah. David Way came up to me one day. "Emil," he said, "my father will give us a press, and I want to set up a print shop. Would you join me?" And I said, "Well my father's a house painter, and I don't know how that qualifies me. I know nothing about printing." And he said, "Well, I'll teach you, and if you'll help me with the printing. I'll help you with the editing. We'll put out a Black Mountain College magazine." He was also in the writing class. And that interested me.

So, I got into printing with David. The press arrived at Black Mountain on the freight train, and then we were presented with a bill. I remember it as a couple hundred dollars, but I read somewhere it was 150 dollars. But I think it was more than that. Anyway, we didn't have the money, but Steve Forbes had a thesis he did on musical scales—the mathematics of musical scales, and he wanted us to print it. So, we took an advance on his book, and he paid the freight bill. We hauled it up and put it in the basement, put it together, and it wouldn't work. David said, "Well, no problem. The printer at Black Mountain has the same press. We'll just go down and see why." So, we made an appointment—he was a grumpy old man—and we came down. It was during a storm, and the electricity

had gone out, and here we were with candles. It was a real Dickens' scene, you know, with candles, examining this press.

Dave says, "Aha! That's it!" So, we went back, and it was it, and in a very short time we had it working. I was thoroughly fascinated.

MEH: One question before you go on. Did you ever print Stephen Forbes' thesis?

EW: Yes. Oh, yes, we did. Albers had some fonts of Bodoni that he brought from the Bauhaus, and he gave it to us to use. And we were only able to print barely half-a-page and then we had to tear it down and reset the other half-a-page. It was a laborious job! But we finally got it out. He had some scales, musical scales, and we went to the Asheville shop and had some cuts made of the scales, and printed those in. Yeah, it was our first job.

MEH: You said you were fascinated by it.

EW: Well, yeah. I'm not a terribly cerebral type, and too much writing—I had writer's block constantly. I'd sit there with a piece of blank white paper and a Standard Royal and nothing would happen. And then I'd go down to the print shop and that was great. It was physical, and you were doing things, you were acting. That would be a great relief for me. Then when David left, I kept it going. We moved it to Lake Eden.

MEH: What sort of work did you do on the press?

EW: Well, we did all the college stuff, you know—the forms—Not the Bulletin. And then we did a lot of personal work for students. Letterheads—everybody had their own personal letterhead [LAUGHS] at Black Mountain. Christmas cards. We did all the programs, especially in May when we had the Dogwood Days. We had

musical programs, we had theater programs, we had art programs, and we did a lot of those programs. I notice you had a couple in your book. The one with the hands—

MEH: Bury the Dead.

EW: Bury the Dead, we did that. Yeah.

MEH: How did that work? You were working with David Way. Was there any supervision stylistically, or were you guys basically on your own just to do stuff?

EW: Well, Albers was our advisor. Neither David nor I were artists, layout artists. Actually, we'd make a rough layout and then we'd do it actually in the chase. We would lock it up and run a proof. Then we'd take that to Albers. I remember one time I took it down. He had a great expression. He would say, "I ask me." I had given him the form, and he'd say, "Emil, I ask me. Could this be better?" He said, "I believe in the ‘tausands’ technique.” Well, you had that quote. I said, "Well, that's fine, with a pencil, but, you know, with a printing press, can you cut it down?" [VIDEOTAPE ONLY SECTION BEGINS] I took a course with Albers my second year, I guess, in layout and drawing. [VIDEOTAPE ONLY SECTION ENDS]

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

MEH: He actually taught a class in typography?

EW: No, I joined his drawing class, but I didn't do any drawing. It was mainly layouts for printing. It was almost a one-to-one thing. I mean, there wasn't anybody else in the class. The thing that really fascinated me about Black Mountain was that

they had twelve professors for the first year, 55 students, 75 students the second year. Ten, twelve was an enormous class. And also some were smaller than that.

One of my favorite memories was the class that Fred Mangold and John Rice gave me. So, I had two professors, and I was the only student. It was "Form and Lit." And Mangold would give me, gave me ten books to read, ten writers. I had to write a short story, a couple of pages. Then I had to rewrite that short story in the style of those ten writers, and that was fascinating. I never realized what the difference styles made in literature. That was my best course, I think.

MEH: And that was Mangold?

EW: Yeah.

MEH: Mangold's not a person you hear much about, but when people remember him, it's always with a lot of respect.

EW: He was a very private person. But, yeah, everybody respected him. Well, I don't want to go into personalities of the faculty. Yeah, he was one of the top guys.

MEH: Did you take any science or math?

EW: I did in high school. I took a lot of biology and zoology, and, of course, you come in my office, you see it dominates my life now. I do a lot of lecturing on the rainforest. In fact, I have one coming up next week on the botany of the rainforest. But at college, no.

MEH: How about other courses you remember, or professors in particular?

EW: I remember music with Evarts, John Evarts. But that was my second, I think it was my second year, and I was getting more and more involved with the War. I just didn't have the patience for it. It's one of my big regrets. The first six months,

the first semester, we studied Bach, and he's my favorite composer today because I understand him more than I do the others. And all due to John. I think he's, he was greatly underrated by the students. I think he was a real part of the life at Black Mountain.

MEH: Underrated in terms of his teaching, or just his importance to the College?

EW: Well, you know, he was not dynamic like Rice. I guess he was a good teacher. I don't know. But he was very accessible to everybody, and then of course Saturday nights was the highlight of the week. Everybody dressed up, and he played music. You must have heard this from everybody else. He would play musical portraits on the piano, and in a very short time you knew exactly who he was portraying. It was fascinating.

Then I remember he did a whole series of "Old Black Joe," and he did it in the musical style of Bach and Wagner. Wagner was "Der Alte Schwarze," and he played a real Wagnerian version of "Old Black Joe." And he did it in the style of Bach with counterpoint. He did the same piece of music in many styles. Well, it was very much like what I was trying to do with literature! [LAUGHS] That was fascinating to me. He did a lot of things like that.

I think one of the, one of the big things was—Fernando Leon denies it, but when he came we all ended up in espadrilles, canvas shoes—rope-soled—

MEH: Fernando's influence?

EW: That's what I thought. I met him at the reunion, and he claims no. He said that no, we had very inferior ones. I thought he had got them from Spain. They were Mexican, he said, and very inferior to the Spanish.

MEH: Oh, you had very—Yeah, I think that probably they came back through—to Black Mountain through the Dreiers' and Albers' influence when they would go down. They brought them back.

EW: Yeah. I don't know who did, but—- And they were wonderful to dance in. They made you feel very light on your feet.

MEH: You didn't make them yourselves. These are the ones they brought back.

EW: No. They were very cheap, and—

MEH: I'm sure.

EW: [LAUGHS]—that was a virtue.

[BREAK IN TAPING]

MEH: What did you do on the work program at the college?

EW: Well, I don't know. I guess I remember picking apples on the farm. Then we got into Lake Eden. We would go across and I worked on the buildings—excavating under some of the cottages to put a stove, a furnace. North Carolina clay—not very easy. Tough digging, yeah. At one point—I guess it was my last summer there. I ran the dump truck. There was a young student at Lake Eden, I can't think of his name—Danny Something?

MEH: Danny Deaver?

EW: —was from California.

MEH: Danny Deaver.

EW: He was running the frontloader, and we were digging out the basement for the new building. He would load the dumptruck, and I would dump it at the far end of the lake. There was a swampy area. I did that for a while. But I also was running

the print shop at Lake Eden, as a commercial venture for myself. And so I did a lot of both.

MEH: Looking back, what is your evaluation of the work programs as part of the whole community and your education there?

EW: Well, for me, I mean it was not a novel experience to work. I'm a Depression baby, and I started working at a very early age. And then I also did a lot of work—the guy from the Work Camps of America, Dick Gothe, who actually went on the BMC faculty, I guess, for a year. But my first summer at school, I worked with Susie Noble as a director at two of his work camps. One was in Cleveland and was part of a Cleveland Settlement House program, and we converted a dairy farm to a summer camp for children. That was a month. Then the other was at Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee. And what we did was clear three or four acres of land and plant fast-growing pine trees. As a Southerner, you know that a lot of farmers put in pine trees for their children's college education. By the time the child grew up, the trees were big enough to harvest. So, it was that same concept I worked on that summer. So, physically I was in fairly good shape. Had done a lot of hiking in the White Mountains when I was working there. So, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the physical work. I think everybody did. And there was a real feeling of togetherness when we got on the truck and came back from Lake Eden, came in and had tea with cookies.

MEH: In your dirty clothes.

EW: Yeah, dirty clothes, and then ran up and have a shower and got ready for dinner. Of course, Saturday night for dancing. It was one of the good things about the

school and different from other schools, that really worked. I think the big part of it was that it wasn't just "make work" for the sake of work. It had a real purpose, and you felt like you were achieving something and doing something for the future, you know.

MEH: It was real work.

EW: Yeah.

MEH: You left in the fall—at the end of the '40 spring? Did you stay through that summer, do you remember?

EW: Which summer? The last summer, of '40-'41?

MEH: Were you there the year they built the Studies Building?

EW: Yeah, I spent that summer after—I left Black Mountain, actually, but I spent the summer at Lake Eden. They also had a restaurant—summer camp sort of thing, and I had my printing press, and I also worked on the Studies Building. And also on some of the cottages.

MEH: Yeah, I was interested that already at that point they were winterizing the cottages, getting furnaces. So, you had to dig out and then build a structure?

EW: Well, these were summer cottages and in order to get heat in them, we had to dig basements, cellars. They were just not full basements, but just sort of shelving in there that you can put a stove—furnace.

MEH: What did you use, cement block or something, to build an enclosure?

EW: I don't remember how we closed them off. I wasn't involved with that. I was just mainly involved in the brute labor of digging [LAUGHS] and getting full of red Carolina clay. I slept in—It was called Black Dwarf or something—one of those

bigger cottages. It might have been the one that burned down. I don't know. But there was a whole crew of people working. Several of the students were students that were just starting at Lake Eden, had never been up in Lee Hall.

I was very interested in that little article—whose, I don't know whose book it was—where they discovered the old press in the back of a woodworking building? I thought that was—a resurrection, you know. I was very happy that somebody else would pick it up.

MEH: It had a really vital life after the War.

EW: Yes.

MEH: I think largely during the War, building the Studies Building and all of that was so—just took everybody's energy—and then there weren't any men students around. They needed somebody to lift the press. You know, it's interesting, as I—I hadn't thought about this. All of the people—There were no women who were seriously ever involved in the printing at the College.

EW: Oh yes. Betty, Betty Brett.

MEH: Betty Brett did, that's right. But in the '50s, you know, all the people who were printing their poems and whatever were men. Actually Tommy Jackson was very involved with presses. You guys should meet.

EW: Yeah, they got some very good presses. I mean, this was an old foot-powered press, and we rigged up a quarter-horse motor on a block of wood with a, with a spring, and greased it. We'd start the press by foot to start the huge flywheel. It was a five-foot flywheel. When that got up to speed, we'd kick the block under the flywheel and it would pick it up and keep it going. That was David's innovation.

David got very intimate with the press, and it finally tore some of his hair out. He was leaning over and had long red hair, and a lock of this hair got in the gears. Ouch. It just pulled out a whole chunk of hair.

MEH: Where was the press set up at Blue Ridge?

EW: In the basement.

MEH: With the library? Wasn't the library in the basement, too?

EW: No, the library was in a separate study, up on the first floor at the far end with some of the offices. There was a big room. I did the Dewey decimal system for that library. I worked in the New York Public Library in the Music Division as a page for a year before I went to Black Mountain. And then I had NYA, fifty cents an hour for twenty hours a month, and my NYA work was setting up the Dewey decimal system in the library. Then at Highlander Folk School, I did the same thing for them. Now I'm involved with the local Cushing Library and a local Christian school library. So, as a page, I haven't progressed very much further. I'm still not a librarian, but I can set up the system.

It was quite a good library. Not big. But I thought it was good. I loved it, fiction books and things. But the basement was also where the washtubs were. At Highlander Folk School—it was on the Cumberland Plateau—we had our first initiation into moonshine. So, I was quite an expert on moonshine, and we discovered at Old Fort, at the foot of the mountain, a moonshining operation going full blast. So, we bought moonshine, and we stole a lot of the charcoal from the art department and put it in the bottom of the bottles and you could just see

the fusel oil gathering around the charcoal. Then you would decant it, carefully, to avoid the oil.

But there was nothing you could do to make it palatable. Students would put all kinds of things in like grapefruit juice, pineapple juice. And that only made it worse. Then about 11, 12 o'clock they'd bring it down to the print shop, because I worked late. I saved my long runs for after midnight. And they would come and spend the time hanging around while I was feeding the press, they were feeding me moonshine. Then we'd all sort of stumble off and go to bed about two in the morning. Not every day. I mean this was a rare thing, but it did happen. It was Life in the Basement after hours.

MEH: What did you do—Well, let's go back, I don't want to—There are several areas I want to cover. But first, you knew Gothe before came to Black Mountain?

EW: Yes, he was the director of our work camp—Work Camps for America.

MEH: Work Camps for America, they were like—they weren't federally funded, were they?

EW: No, it was a private thing. He, he must have learned work camp philosophy in Germany. He never did tell us much about it, so I don't know what his background was. But he started this foundation called Work Camps for America. They really were interesting camps. I mean, for example, in Cleveland, half the group were from the slums, from the Goodrich Settlement House in Cleveland. And the other half were college kids, like Susie and myself. Susie and I were both getting fifty dollars a month as junior leaders. And there was a lot of

antagonism to Joe College. Of course, they didn't have calluses on their hands, they didn't know how to use a sledgehammer. But when we played volleyball, we were pretty even. It was a real thing. Well, the main thing was that in the afternoons we would have field trips. We went to Akron to the tire building places, and to the big farms, dairy farms, and different places, and we would interview people, and they would send people to the camp. So, we would have the Director of Labor Relations for Goodrich come up and tell us about their labor relations. Then we'd have the head of the local union come in and tell us their side of the story. Then we would have debates. You were not allowed to use information that you knew before. You had to use the information you got from the interviews and it was fascinating. At the end of the month, the Cleveland kids were questioning us: how do you get to college? How can you get scholarships? They really were turned on, and the college kids had great respect for the Cleveland kids. So, it was a real learning experience. You'd get up at dawn. Oh, Dick was a real martinet: Get out there in the wet grass and go through calisthenics. It was a real experience, and, of course, at Highhlander it was a very similar thing. We went to coal mines. And we had coal mining union officials come talk to us. We went to a cotton mill.

MEH: Gothe organized this?

EW: Yeah, well, yeah Dick—Well, he had the local people—at Highlander. There was no problem because they worked with the labor union in their summer sessions. It was going on while we were working, so we had real face-to-face talks with guys who were taking shop steward training in the CIO, and, of course, this was

interracial because the CIO took in the blacks and the whites, which the AFofL never did. But then they had this dilemma: where do you train these people? Because in the South it was illegal to have interracial schools. They could at Highlander, and there they were, you know.

MEH: Why could they at Highlander?

EW: Well, because Highlander defied the regulations.

MEH: They just did it.

EW: Just did it. And I took a six-week's course at the end of my third year at Black Mountain at Highlander Folk School. Everybody there—there must have been fifteen or eighteen people—everybody there was on strike, and that's how they had the time to go to school. It was quite an education for me. I learned about labor unions in Highlander by going there in the work camp with Dick.

MEH: Dick Gothe is sort of a mysterious character. I mean, I found contradictions because he had been involved with youth work camps in Germany, and then he came to this country and did that. I'm not sure that he came as a refugee. I'm not sure whether he came willingly, you know, as a refugee. But there was great suspicion on the part of the Black Mountain faculty, just through correspondence, that he had like Fascist connections and all this stuff, which seems to me totally contradictory for someone doing the sort of work camp things that he was doing.

EW: Well, I have no suspicions. And I, you know, I was anti-Fascist, and I was pretty well-versed in German Fascism by reading about it. I had no suspicions because he was very democratic. I mean he was autocratic in a way—a disciplinarian, so to speak. But he was also very democratic in the sense that he forced us outside

of our opinions he forced us to get our opinions from real sources, which I think was a marvelous educational experience for me.

MEH: It may be just the sort of thing that he was doing in terms of labor and whether it made the Black Mountain people very paranoid, I don't know. But there was a lot of suspicion that he was, you know, had some connections to—

EW: That he was doing what? I mean—

MEH: I don't know whether it grew out—I'd have to review the correspondence. I don't know whether it grew out of his having been involved with the youth movement in Germany and with some association with Hitler Youth, and how it evolved. I don't know if it was just paranoia. I think that some of this information was coming from people in the North. It could be that, you know, because of his interest in unions and the labor movement and whatever, that he was a threat to people and that they were, you know, it's hard to say. But it always seemed to me contradictory, because of his interest in this sort of social issue. If they were going to suspect him of anything, it would have been Communist affiliation instead of Fascist—

EW: Yeah. I mean, why would, why would the Nazi Party send somebody here to undermine—I mean that seems a little bit farfetched.

MEH: But there is a lot of stuff in correspondence to that effect. Do you know what happened to him?

EW: No, I don't. As a matter of fact, I didn't meet him when he was at Lake Eden. When I left Black Mountain, I worked in a couple of print shops for a year. I worked—You know Sue Spayth. I worked with her father in Dunellen, New Jersey. I ran a newspaper, a weekly newspaper, and the press, and did job work

for him, trying to get into the AFofL printers' union, because you could go anywhere in the United States and sign on their bulletin board and the first job that comes up, you get. They hire all the printers in this country. And at very good pay. I thought I'll never make my living writing, but if I could get on the printers' union list and make good money, then I could quit for several months and write and when I got hungry get another job. Well, it was an illusion because you had to be born into the trade union to get in. Mr Spayth carried the union label on his paper, and when I applied to get a card in the union, they sent an old man to take my job. Mr. Spayth wrote a scathing editorial against the union and took a proof sheet and sent it to them and told them he would print this if they didn't behave. So, they didn't bother. Of course, they had a big local there. They did comic books and stuff.

Well, anyway, when I couldn't get into the union, I went to Knoxville, Tennessee. Somebody I had met at Highlander, a labor guy who was the head of the CIO in Knoxville, in Tennessee, put me on his expense account, fifteen dollars a week, while he was trying to get me into the Southern branch of the pressmans' union. But I got so interested in organizing that I never did try. I spent a couple of years as a CIO organizer. From Knoxville, I came to Lake Eden, I remember, and lectured one time on the CIO. Nobody ran me off, although I think it was maybe one of the things they held against Fran. I saw her, you know, last year. She's in a retirement home in Philadelphia.

MEH: Who is this?

EW: Fran DeGraaff.

MEH: Oh, right. What—At Black Mountain, was there any discussion of integrating the College while you were there?

EW: What do you mean?

MEH: At Black Mountain College, was there any discussion of integrating the College when you were there?

EW: No. No. No, I guess they would have been horrified if anybody suggested that. And we had a very small group of sort of anti-war people—Ted Dreier was very prominent in that, Ted and Bobbie. And one or two other faculty members were interested, but there was no real big anti-war push.

[IRRELEVANT REMARKS ABOUT BACKGROUND SOUND NOT TRANSCRIBED].

MEH: Anti-war in the sense of being opposed to—

EW: [OVERTALK] World War II.

MEH: To World War II. Was this an isolationist point of view, or opposition to—?

EW: No, it was an anti-war point of view. I was not an isolationist, and I'm not against violence. I'm not a pacifist. I was against war. I thought war was the ultimate stupidity. Still feel that way. And I still have great doubts as to whether I should have gone. I had great doubts then, and—But then I got to the point where, you know, with Fascism taking over Europe and so forth, and I felt it was the fate of my generation and stupid as it was I had to do it. But I never felt wholehearted about it. Well, let's not get into that.

MEH: At Black Mountain was there any real political orientation in the sense of the College being concerned, social concern, or was it more aesthetically inclined?

EW: Very little. There was, well there was Portell-Vilá, but he was not very active. He was not a leader within in the community or, you know, he was sort of on the fringes of everything. And I don't know what his political point of view was. He was probably conservative, as far as I can remember. No, there never was, never was any sort of left-wing thinking going on. I was probably as radical as they came, and I was immersed in Black Mountain. I didn't—I had completely gone adrift.

In the Bronx, in high school, I was very active. Everybody was. I mean, this was Depression time, you know, and actually there was a real almost revival of culture in the Bronx, in New York. The WPA, Theatre of Action, I mean we saw some great plays. I saw Macbeth done in Harlem as cast in Haiti, all wearing bright king costumes, and the three witches were voodoo witches, and it was all in the Haitian atmosphere but it was pure Macbeth. Pure Shakespeare as directed by Orson Welles. I was fascinated. I still remember it. I was fifteen, and there were all kinds of things in the arts. The best books on the States were written—you know WPA, on North Carolina, every state had its own book. You've seen them, haven't you? They're great. Still great.

MEH: They are. They're an excellent reference for all kinds of things.

EW: You've got to give Roosevelt a little credit for really reviving the country—not just financially. So, I was up to my eyebrows in all this activity, and some of it was cultural, some of it was political. Anti-fascist, anti-war. And then I went to Black Mountain and just completely was immersed in the Black Mountain culture ‘til the War came.

MEH: How aware were you of the plight of the refugees?

EW: Very. Very. And very disturbed that so few were allowed in this country. I mean very proud of Black Mountain, you know, taking in the refugees. But that's a drop in the bucket. For every one we took, thousands were killed. Yeah, I was very aware. Now we didn't know anything about the concentration camps. But we knew that, that the Jews were really having a hard time and were thrown into camps, you know, and so forth. We knew they were being killed. I mean, remember the Ship of Fools episode. They came into New York harbor and were not allowed to land. The quota for Jews in the United States was—Well, the quota of any immigrants was something like twenty-seven thousand. The quota was never fulfilled.

MEH: Never fulfilled?

EW: They never took in the full quota. I mean, you know, the State Department was anti-Semitic, and Roosevelt who was probably not anti-Semitic, but—He had the Jewish vote anyway so he didn't want to disturb the status quo. It's one of the things I have against him, but he did some other things that I approve of.

MEH: Did you take any classes besides the drawing classes which was a typography class with Albers? Did you take his design or—

EW: No. [VIDEOTAPE ONLY SECTION BEGINS] He was my faculty advisor and I always had to bring things to him. But I took that one class. [VIDEOTAPE ONLY SECTION ENDS]

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

EW: Well, I have the advantage of thinking about all this recently.

MEH: With your book.

EW: Yes. So, a lot of it's fresh in my mind.

[IRRELEVANT CONVERSATION NOT TRANSCRIBED]

MEH: What did you do for entertainment at Black Mountain?

EW: Now, you're getting personal [LAUGHTER].

MEH: Now, we're getting to the x-rated stuff. I was just warming you up.

EW: Well, let's see, what did we do? Well, we had Allan Sly's dancing class—it's British, what is it? English folk dancing. And we did it in the gym, and that was great. It really was fascinating because there was folk dancing, but it wasn't the Tennessee square dancing type of "swing your lady." I mean, you know, this was all very disciplined. Every step is to a beat of the music, and you had "A" music and "B" music. You know, it was very, very highly organized and everything, but it was wonderful.

I think mostly—There were no ball games or anything like that. Hiking was one of my great things. You know the trail—I don't know if you know the trail that goes from the back of the college up to Blue Ridge along the ridge.

MEH: You're talking about from Lake Eden, or from—

EW: No, I never went to school at Lake Eden. Across the Blue Ridge and then down the other side there was a loop, and I don't know how many miles it is but it was very steep uphill and very steep downhill. Sundays I would do that loop and try to cut time off the schedule, you know, a little faster. It was stupid, because you come thundering down this trail which was a zigzag trail made by mules, mostly carrying corn to make moonshine, you know, up at the top. It was a zigzag trail

so that it wasn't a gradual turn: you just had to stop and make an abrupt turn. But there was a lot of hiking. We went up to the Craggies, Mount Mitchell, and did that several times as a group and we did it a number of times just a few friends.

Leslie Katz had a car, a little car, and we would go to some of the lakes around, go swimming. But I think walking and just socializing in somebody's den. You know, we'd go in his study in a little group, talk, play music. Some people had record players. There weren't any tapes in those days. I don't know. There wasn't too much organized recreation.

[IRRELEVANT COMMENTS ABOUT TAKING PICTURES NOT TRANSCRIBED]

EW: Well, we were very lucky. My mother-in-law had this cottage, and we had no place to go. We were living in New York, working, and we had no house anywhere to sell, but we could come up to Maine. I guess I was pretty much a grasshopper all my life, instead of an ant. So, we inherited this place, and what luck!

MEH: It's wonderful.

EW: We appreciate it. You look out that picture window every morning and the scene out here changes. Different ducks during the year, we get loons out here a couple times a year, and the fishermen come in. They came in and cornered a whole school of herring right in our cove here and came up with a braille net and scooped them up. Then, of course, the lobstermen come. Earlier in the year we have a lot of lobster pots, but then the lobsters go out a little deeper so we don't have too many now. So, it's a changing scene, and the tide goes in and out twice a day. It's really great.

MEH: So, going back to Black Mountain. What about plays? You had a small part in—

EW: Several plays.

MEH: What other plays were you involved with?

EW: I was in Bury the Dead, Waiting for Lefty, Macbeth. You know that story.

MEH: The Macbeth story?

EW: This came at a time in May when we had the Dogwood Days. And, so, I spent most of my time in the press room putting out pamphlets and programs. And, so, I didn't have much time to rehearse. So, they cast me as one of the soldiers, when Birnam Woods comes to Dunsinane. And they made uniforms. We wore shorts, and they basted these leggings with thread, you know, big stitches, onto your shorts. Breastplates were hubcaps, with a chain around your neck, and I don't know, some sort of metal-looking headpiece made of paper, and a long spear. Then they took all the dining room tables and put them down in the gym, and they had three layers of tables. They took the carpet from the lobby—there was a huge gray carpet, draped it over this so the action took place on several levels. Some of the soliloquies and things were on the top table, and so forth and so on. The light people were in the rafters of the gym. To change scenes, they would turn the lights out completely, and it was utter darkness. Well, I never rehearsed, but I depended on the guy in front of me. He was to guide me, you know. Well, we had to get up on the first level, and in the dark I got on the first level, and he said to me "Move over!" I did, and kerplunk, I went off the edge of the thing. Of course the breastplate and the spear hitting the gym floor was very loud. Everybody thought somebody fell out of the lighting. I crawled back up. My

spear had broken, and I was holding it at the break, and my bastings had come loose so my leggings were dripping, and I was a mess. When the lights came on everybody was looking around for the body and there was no body, and they looked up and everybody was up there. It took a while to catch me! So, I guess I played a prominent part, but not the best part. That was my only experience in Macbeth.

But in the other two, I had lines.

MEH: What were the other two?

EW: Waiting for Lefty and Bury the Dead. I think those are the only two I was in.

MEH: Bob Wunsch was directing these?

EW: Yeah.

MEH: What was he like as a director?

EW: Well fine, I guess. He wasn't—I don't know. He was good. I mean he really would set you up, make you work. I guess he was—For what was needed, he was excellent.

MEH: What was he like just as a person in the community? As a personality?

EW: Don't mind our hummingbirds. Sort of old ladyish. I think he had an inferiority complex, and I think that, mainly because of Rice. I never saw Rice being actually mean to him, but Rice could be mean. He could be sarcastic. You say something a little on the silly side, and he would pick it up. So, I think Wunsch was a little afraid of Rice, and I don't think he felt up to the intellectual level of some of the other faculty members. But he made up for it in being hardworking and very active.

A very interesting thing happened. When I was hitchhiking through North Carolina, in Statesville—I got into Statesville. It was rainy at night. I went in a little cafeteria, a little café, a little honky-tonk type cafeteria, café, and had a cup of coffee and an egg sandwich, and I was trying to spend some time in the dry. There was a farmer sitting in a booth that kept looking at me because I had a cup of coffee and every time the counterman would turn his back I would empty the cream into my cup. I was running on very short rations. So, anyway, he was observing this, and I caught his eye, and he told me to come over. He was drinking beer. Turned out to be a very literate guy. Had gone to the University of North Carolina for a couple of years, and then his farm got into trouble, and his father made him quit and come to work on the farm.

We got to really talking, you know, as you do with strangers and I told him I wanted to write. And I told him that I didn't know whether I could or not but I wanted to and he said, "Listen, you know Tom Wolfe?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "He was the hero of our college, and he wrote a story in the college magazine and I have a copy of it. You read that story and you'll never feel inferior again. It's the worst thing you'll ever read." Actually, I did go home with him. He put me up on the porch in one of those gliders, and he showed me the magazine. I read the story. It really was terrible. It was all about Southern pride during the Civil War. He's a Willberforce of Virginia and he wouldn't be a coward, would he? That kind of stuff, full of clichés. And then Bob Wunsch also had a copy of that magazine.

You know, Bob said that he was a roommate of Wolfe anyway, certainly knew him, and he had a copy of that magazine. So, I read it again. I would love to get a copy of that. Should be able to get it through the archives someway.

MEH: I don't know if it's in the college archives, but I'm sure in Tom Wolfe's bibliographies you probably could identify it. There aren't that many early—it's probably a really early work.

EW: Well, it was one of the University of North Carolina magazines when he was there as a student, so you should be able to get the magazine.

MEH: What about—Were you aware of Bob Wunsch's work with black groups in the South?

EW: Bob? No. He never mentioned it.

MEH: He was very involved with—

EW: Before he went to Black Mountain?

MEH: At Black Mountain.

EW: At Black Mountain.

MEH: Very compassionate and concerned with integration in the South.

EW: He was a compassionate person, but I didn't know he worked with blacks.

MEH: There's some suspicion—nobody will ever know whether the—when he was arrested with this guy in Asheville, there's some suspicion that it was a set-up, really, by people to get him out of the state—who realized he was homosexual. So, it's—But he was deeply involved. A lot of this went through the dramatics associations, in his working with black schools and with black teachers,

whatever. What else? What have we not covered? That you have particularly vivid memories of?

EW: Three years.

MEH: What about visitors? Are there any visitors you remember?

EW: Yeah, that was a big thing. Odets came to visit while I was there, and he had just come from Hollywood where he did, what was it? Golden Boy—the Hollywood film that he wrote. And I had seen Waiting for Lefty when I was in high school. My brother was a taxi driver in New York, and so I went down to see the play. I was very moved by it. You know, there's a scene at the end—The whole thing is a question of whether they should strike or not, and Lefty is the strike leader and gets killed, I guess, by the scabs or something. And the news comes—And the theater is a union meeting, and everybody in the theater—you know the play—is a member of the union. Somebody, you know, right close to you will yell, "Strike!" and another one down the aisle, "Strike!" And the whole audience gets to their feet, and it's a very moving scene, and a very dramatic scene. Odets was raised in my neighborhood in the Bronx. I didn't know him, but I mean he was—And he talks about a scene at 174th Street subway stop. Well, that was my subway stop. I was really into it. So, I told him how thrilled I was by seeing it, and he was very pleased.

Then we got into Golden Boy, and I don't know who it was, although I joined in. We thought he was prostituting his art by going to Hollywood.

MEH: What did he say?

EW: He said, "Well, no, I'm reaching millions of people this way. With my plays I reached a few thousand but—" And then of course the counter argument is "But what are you reaching it with?" You know, that kind of thing. But it was thrilling to really sit down and talk to somebody or eat dinner with them. We had several people like that.

I think the best one was a compatriot of Moellenhoff, Hans Sachs. Do you know the name?

MEH: I know the name.

EW: Well, he came, and they called him The Turtle. He was a little guy, and his head stuck out like this. Big sharp nose, baldy, and he looked just like a turtle. And he gave a psychoanalysis of Shakespeare through Macbeth, since we were going to put on the play. It took three nights, the whole college sitting in the lobby, and this little turtle sitting there. By the time he was through, he was Shakespeare. I mean he was not a turtle. He really grew in our... But his first night—Gee, I wish somebody had taped that. It was fantastic.

The first night he told us about the period that Shakespeare was living in and the way Shakespeare got his material, which was—I remember the Holinshed Chronicles. This was a series of chronicles about kings and historical events in Scotland and so forth. That's where Shakespeare drew his material. And he just went on—that whole night was spent on the background. The second night he started to go into Macbeth, analyzing, psychoanalyzing Macbeth. I remember the number of times he mentions sleep, number of times he mentions blood. He really went in—And he always raised his hand, and he would say

"Number 1, Number 2," like that on his fingers. Anyway, that whole night was spent in psychoanalyzing Macbeth itself.

Then the third night he transferred the whole thing over to Shakespeare, and he unveiled Shakespeare for us, as seen through Macbeth. It was a super thing, and I remember that vividly. That was one of the highlights, I think, of memory. And then there were others.

Oh, I remember the St. John's students came to visit, and we had a big debate in the lobby between St. John's Hundred Books and Black Mountain philosophy. That was also memorable.

MEH: Was it an organized visit or just students who were traveling around?

EW: No, I think it was organized. I had the impression it was organized. It could have been just—But there were quite a number of them, and some faculty members. And then the students would come down from the Chicago School of Design. Moholy-Nagy's group would come down and Black Mountain students would go to Chicago. I guess it was my second summer here. I was looking for work and somebody said, "Well, Moholy-Nagy has a camp," outside—Wisconsin or someplace. "He may need some help." So, I went to interview him for a job. Well, he thought I was interviewing to be a student, and we had a fascinating discussion all coming from him of course. I didn't know—I'm no expert on art. But I was fascinated by it. And then the point came up, when did I want to go to school? And I said, “No, I didn't want to go to school. I wanted a job in his summer camp.” "I don't have any jobs in the summer camp." But anyway, there was a very good interchange between the two schools.

I don't know, a number of other people—Adamic came down. I have all his books. He was, he's to me a very interesting person.

MEH: Had he already written his article at that point? Or was he—

EW: [OVERTALK]. Yes, yes. I saw it in Harper's Magazine, '36, before I ever came down.

MEH: What do you remember about Rice's resignation and that whole fracas? Do you have any recollections of the discussions or the way students were or were not involved in the process?

EW: Students were not involved. I wasn't. I guess the student officers were. I was on the student—what did they call it, student council or whatever it was. I was on it my first year at Black Mountain with Sunley. But by the third year, I was not into it [LAUGHS]. And I guess I was selfishly a little concerned about myself at that point.

Well, it was a big loss because my third year there he didn't teach. As he was my main reason for being at Black Mountain, you know, so I—But I don't remember much about the discussion. We were not involved. We knew what was going on, somewhat, but it was all rumors and easy to discount a lot of the rumors. I didn't believe that, I don't believe this, you know. I never really felt—Well, the same thing I feel about Kennedy and Clinton and all the Presidents who had girlfriends they shouldn't have had, you know. That had nothing to do with their being President, as far as I'm concerned. And the same thing with Rice. Except for his relationship with Mary [Nell], his wife, you know, which I thought got pretty nasty—You didn't respect him for it, but on the other

hand, you didn't condemn him, and I certainly wouldn't have run him out of the college for what he did. [UNINTELL]. I don't know how much proof anybody had. I mean I don't know any facts and I wouldn't want to be quoted on any facts because I just didn't know them. I just knew rumors.

Yeah, and it was very unsettling, as I remember, not to have him as my teacher.

MEH: How did this sort of disagreement affect the learning experience at Black Mountain? The disagreements in the faculty, the various crises or whatever, did this really affect your learning experience at the College?

EW: Learning? Well it did in the sense that—You know, one of John Rice's philosophies is that the first-year student takes too many classes. The second year student settles down. The full-time, the <u>real</u> student is down to one class, you know. Well, I was down to practically none at that time, for personal reasons, so it's hard for me to evaluate how I would have felt if everything was normal around me in the world. I was very deeply affected by his not teaching. I thought a lot of the faculty members were pretty petty about their reaction. I mean, they were kicking somebody when they were down. I don't blame them, in a sense, because he was not above doing it to them. But at the same time, you didn't admire it.

MEH: Why did you leave Black Mountain?

EW: Well, because I had lost interest in school, period. I knew I was going in the Army and had to go to the War. I just, I didn't feel any affinity for staying in school, and they didn't feel much affinity to have me stay. I don't know if they would have renewed—

MEH: How was that made known?

EW: I didn't know, Mary, until I went to the archives last year, and there were little clippings from faculty meetings, and I got all the reactions of everybody on Willimetz. It was quite a shock. I was really taken aback. But on thinking about it, I mean, I don't blame them. But I just wasn't working. I just was involved in the War and doing a lot of reading, trying to—I wasn't sure I was going to go. I'm not a conscientious objector but I, I wasn't sure—

Yeah, it was a personal thing, you know. And I, I was quite shocked by it. Let me break off just for a minute.

[BREAK IN RECORDING; INTERCHANGE ABOUT FILMING NOT TRANSCRIBED]

MEH: That's the cover from Rice's book?

EW: One of the quotes I have from Rice that I got in the archives was that he thought I had written myself out, and that I wrote nothing but hobo stories, and that I was repeating myself with hobo stories. Of course, the feeling I have is Rice had the same problem. He was an excellent writer. He wrote, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century* while I was at college, mostly. And his output, you know, as a writer after he left the school was very meager.

This is one of the good ones, the only one I ever read, so I think it's great.

MEH: Some people have said maybe it's true that Rice was lazy. I mean, writing is very hard work. But obviously so gifted. Several students have had the same experience of going to the State Archives, seeing their records, and finding (1) that they assigned grades for transfer credit purposes and that grades were lower than they thought they were, that the teacher essentially gave them the

impression that they were doing better than the teacher actually thought; and (2) that they were very surprised by comments. What do you think about a system where a teacher can give grades without having to explain them to the students?

EW: But that's not the Black Mountain way, you see. The Black Mountain way is no grades.

MEH: Yeah, but they ended up having to give grades because students needed them for transfer purposes. But the bottom line is that even though the idea was that the students won't know what the grade is so they aren't working for grades, they still were getting grades.

EW: No, I think that's a mistake. Although a number of the students, a good number of the students did transfer to prestigious colleges: MIT, Harvard, and so forth, and did very well. Fernando, for example, studied engineering with a guy named Lindsay, Charles Lindsay? I don't even remember Charles Lindsay, but he was there my last year. It shows how much I was out of things. But, anyway, he went on and studied engineering after he left Black Mountain and got a very good job. You've got to remember that a lot of these students were like me. I mean, they were not scholars. I was not a scholar. I was not out for grades, and if the class didn't interest me, I didn't give it much attention, you know. So, it's not the teacher's fault. Black Mountain accommodated a lot of people who were not scholars.

I wanted to talk about this student, Tommy Wentworth.

MEH: Okay. [INSTRUCTIONS NOT TRANSCRIBED] Do you know what happened to him?

EW: Yes, I do, and that's why I want to talk about it. I came over when I had long weekends. I was working for the CIO in Knoxville, and not too far away by bus to—And, you know, my girlfriend was Harriett Engelhardt. And she stayed at Lake Eden for a year, and so I would come over on weekends. One time—I told you I lectured on the CIO, and Harriett and I were going for a walk, and Tommy, who was a very young student and almost really adolescent with pimples and very thin and small and eager, and he would come along. You know, that's the last thing I wanted was Tommy to trail along with us.

I remember one night there was a fire on Blue Ridge, and everybody at Black Mountain piled into trucks with shovels and brooms and things and went over, and I ended up working with Tommy all night long on the Blue Ridge together, just the two of us, and I got to talk to him more and I got to like him. Then I was drafted, and I went to Camp Shelby in Mississippi for infantry training, and Tommy was in my company. He had a little chess set—the portable one with pegs—and we went on bivouacs, and in the rain we'd be under the kitchen truck playing chess, you know, on this little chessboard of his. I really became very fond of Tommy.

We got separated. He went to a regiment in the 29th Division. I went to a different one. Tommy was killed in Normandy.

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2; BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

EW: [VIDEOTAPE ONLY SECTION BEGINS] I met somebody who knew him and he told me that Tommy was an acting sergeant when he was killed,

which is amazing because he certainly was not that type. He wasn't an army person.

MEH: You said he was [VIDEOTAPE ONLY SECTION ENDS] an acting sergeant when he was killed?

EW: Yeah. Well, I got this photo at the Archives. I was very pleased to get it, because I didn't have any pictures of Tommy. Basic Training put a tremendous strain on you, and I was fairly well built and in good shape. But Tommy was very slight, very academic. We went on a forced march of a hundred miles from Hattiesburg, Mississippi to Biloxi, in August, on the highways. We lost something like thirty-five guys dead from heat exhaustion.

MEH: Literally dead?

EW: So they said. It was a stupid thing that the army does, and it's all right to do it in Canada, but not in Mississippi in the summertime. I would keep looking back at Tommy. We had full field packs, nine pound rifles to carry, the whole works. He would be leaning forward with the weight of his pack. I said to Tommy—well guys were dropping out, and I said, "Tommy, drop out. You're not built for this. Just drop out." He said, "No, I just want to see how far I can go," and he made the whole thing. So, he was a very determined, conscious young boy. I guess he was too conscientious, and they killed him. I dug holes. I mean I wasn't conscientious. I mean we stopped. I dug a hole and got in it. And I survived. But he didn't.

MEH: There's another picture there I wanted you to—that we saw inside—Oh, I wanted to ask you about the pictures—Why don't you go ahead and show anything in [OVERTALK].

EW: Well, this is Fran de Graaff, that I also got out of the archives.

MEH: Okay, who are the other people in the pictures? I mean right to left.

EW: I don't know—None of them. I didn't know any of them.

MEH: Did you study with her?

EW: No, she—

MEH: She was later, wasn't she?

EW: She came to Lake Eden, but she was the, one of the faculty members that was interested in what I was doing in the CIO. She was a left-wing type. So I got to know her fairly well at Lake Eden. I had the same experience at Lake Eden and my first few weeks at Black Mountain in Blue Ridge. Everybody has a study, and after dinner everybody goes to their study or to a class, and you go in the hallway and you don't know where anybody is behind which door, and it's an empty hallway and you feel very lonely. You feel very out of things. The same thing was in the study hall at Lake Eden. I knew a few of the students, that slopped over from Lee Hall—like Betty Brett, Harriett, a few others. Very few. So, you go down that hallway and it was the same experience—you didn't know anybody. If nobody would come out, what do you do? Where do you go, and how do you entertain yourself?

I got to know Fran pretty well. I knew I was welcome to come to other studies and talk and so on. I got to really enjoy it. I saw her last year—she's 93 or something now—and we had a nice talk about Black Mountain.

So, anyway, that's another picture I got at archives. This is Sue Spayth. This is Macbeth, and she's doing the costumes for Macbeth, which I told you about. You can see the kind of hats that they made.

MEH: Everything improvised.

EW: That's for the Queen, I guess. She was in the play. It was her father that gave me a job. And this is his self-published book. “It Was Done The Hard Way.”

MEH: He's an editor. What was the town in the paper?

EW: Dunellen, New Jersey. This is the first time I really got the full story of how he set up the press. Turns out that he had a very similar youth. I mean, I rode freight trains and bummed around the country. It was Depression time, and he did the same thing about ten or fifteen years earlier. Anyway. Sue gave me the book. She's now in Charlotte, North Carolina. You know her?

MEH: Um-hm [AFFIRMATIVE].

EW: Yeah. Very sweet person. I don't know if I have any other pictures.

MEH: One thing I was going to ask you about is you had the, the thing from the print shop. I've always wondered exactly how that was set up—who did it [INAUDIBLE].

EW: What do you mean? My picture?

MEH: You were going to say something about the Bill Reed, but first, this publication, who did that? Were you there when that was done?

EW: Well, I think that was done by the Art Department, the art students. Bill, Bill did a lot of these things, but I really couldn't identify any of them.

MEH: What were you going to say about Bill Reed?

EW: When I came down on the Greyhound bus, he was the one that met me at the Village. He had a car, and he drove me up, and he was my orientator. I mean he clued me in about all the mechanics of living at the college. I was fascinated by him. The first artist that I'd ever seen working. He had a bigger place to work than I did. But his was one of the few places I felt free to drop in on because when you're painting it's not the same thing as when you're writing. You can stop and talk. Or you can talk as you work. And he was the first artist who was vocal about what he was doing, and that was, in itself, was a new experience. But he was a very lovely guy. A real sweetheart.

It wasn't too long I found out he was a homosexual, but he never, he never imposed it on me. He was obviously very fond of me, we were very, very close friends. I noticed in the archives that somebody in the faculty says, "Well, I noticed that he and Bill Reed are not close anymore." Obviously, we were being scrutinized by the faculty.

MEH: That's funny.

EW: I guess they thought I was a homosexual in the early days, although it wasn't too long before they found out I had girlfriends. But anyway, I was amused by the fact that they were keeping tabs on us.

MEH: In the early years, the faculty really kept very close scrutiny.

EW: There weren't very many of us, you see. My first year, there were fifty-five students, so you didn't have to keep scrutiny. Everything was clear, you know. I mean, not clear, but I mean you noticed everybody.

MEH: If you go through the minutes, the faculty are constantly evaluating students, you know, in terms of their progress, which didn't happen at all later on. As the college, not officially.

EW: Well, I really wasn't aware that they were evaluating. That's what the big surprise was. Of course, these are snippets, so you don't know what came before or went after of what they were saying. I don't know. Barnes, for example, Walter Barnes, was one of my champions—which I had no idea. I took a course with him on history, and he gave me a bibliography for me to read. And when the point came up that I wasn't working, he said, "Well, he reads." Apparently he thought I did well on his class. So, it was very strange getting this fifty year lapse and then getting reactions that I had no idea existed. And—well, strange.

MEH: Several people have had the same reaction.

EW: Because it's so unexpected.

MEH: We have a few minutes, so let's talk a little bit about what you've done since you left the College.

EW: Well, the big thing, of course, was I went to war. I was in the infantry, was wounded twice, discharged with psychoneurosis. Then I came back to New York. No, I ended up in Vienna, which is my mother and father's hometown. My father left Vienna to get out of World War I. He left in 1913. Anyway, I didn't know any relatives in this country—one grandmother and one uncle, that's all I ever knew. Joie is related to everybody in Cushing and Thomaston.

So, I signed up for an extra six months to stay in Vienna to be with my family, and that was quite a lovely experience for me after the War. Then I came

back to New York, and I worked for Ezra Stoller, who's an architectural photographer. He was the number one architectural photographer. I had met Gropius and Breuer casually at Black Mountain, but we photographed all their buildings so I got to know them better. And Frank Lloyd Wright—we spent time in Taliesin. So, I spent two years as an architectural photographer with 8 x 10 view camera with everything upside down [LAUGHS].

When I left him, I wanted to go back south to Highlander. I was going to get a candid camera, so I bought a 4 x 5 view camera and obviously it wasn't the kind of camera to take the kind of pictures, action pictures, I wanted, but that's where I met Joie. I met Joie on a Greyhound bus going to Highlander. She was a nursery school teacher going on a trip to TVA. And convinced her she should run the Highlander Nursery School and Community Program. And we got married down there. Our two boys were born in Tennessee. And then things got very slow at Highlander. The CIO got very affluent and didn't need a little school like that for their training, and the Farmers Union was there for several years, and they gave up on the South and went back to Colorado. And the interracial movement hadn't gotten started. This was '54, '55. So, things are very slow. And, so, Joie and I left the school and went to Knoxville, and I set up my own photographic studio in Knoxville, and finally got to earn a living but it was very boring. I didn't have any real interesting things to do with photography. I was working for the Rich’s department store doing product shots, the underwear factories, hosiery mills, things like that.

So, I got bored and a friend of mine at the University of Tennessee got a job with AID in Bolivia, teaching political science. Imagine, teaching political science to Bolivians! Anyway, he met a guy who had a film company in Lima, who was boasting what a great company he had. This guy's an ex-Hollywood cameraman. And it's a long story, but anyway he was boasting, "But the only problem was," he said, "I can't find people I can train." My friend says, "Oh I know somebody. He would come down." He did. He knew me, and I came down after a few letters and telephone calls.

I went down and thought it was going to be great, sent for the family. Joie sold the house, the car, and everything in Knoxville and came down with the two little kids. And a few months later the guy folded up and left Peru and left me high and dry. In fact, I was in the hospital having my gallstones taken out. And so we had a choice of (we were broke; he was supposed to be paying me) of going back, borrowing money to go home, or see what we could do on our own. And I started my own film company, and we did the first TV commercial in Peru in 1961. And, finally, after five years of struggling had a good company. And were there thirteen years, and it was the best years of my life, I guess.

MEH: What type of work did you do basically?

EW: Well, I did a lot of documentary films. We did everything. We did murals, we did still photography, we did movies. I was a stringer for ABC News, the Hearst Metrotone News in 35 mm. And mainly documentaries for corporations. Did a lot of mining shots, and then USAS hired me to do a film magazine every month in Spanish for local consumption. I did 25 of these, which took me to every corner

of Peru. I loved it, just loved it. Then the Peruvian Army took over. Things started to get a little dicey. We weren't ready to leave Peru, but we said if we had to leave, where would we go? That was the end. The minute you start thinking about leaving, you—So, we came back to New York, which was a big mistake, because I had no connections in New York, no clients. We had another four or five years of hard times trying to survive. And Joie taught school in Queens, an all-black school, Special Ed. Had a terrible experience. Finally, my company picked up again. We were fifteen years in New York.

Then we retired, came here.

MEH: What type of work did you do basically in New York with your film company?

EW: Well, in New York I did very few films. I couldn't get into the film world. I did a few. I did the first film on Foxfire. You know Foxfire? Well, in Raben Gap, Georgia, I did the first film on Foxfire in '74. I did some films for schools for McGraw Hill, about South America. I did a series of family planning films for Health, Education and Welfare. My last three or four years in South America, I did family planning films in Bogota, Mexico, and so I had a reputation when I came here, and it lasted a couple of years. Then all the family planning money was abolished by AID, so that peaked out. I did a few other films, small films, but I did a lot of teacher training filmstrips for daycare teachers in New York, Brooklyn, Bronx. Sue Spayth is using some of them now in Charlotte.

Yeah, we did quite a lot of teacher training films. That was my main income. Films were the sort of—I never made any money on films—Like the films I wanted to make, nobody would sponsor—like the Foxfire film, had a $55,000

budget. We raised thirty-five. The rest came out of our salaries. So, filmmaking was—I sort of lost that trend.

MEH: I have two other questions. One, something about your work now with the rainforest.

EW: I went to the rainforest. I did a film, a documentary, on a Shipibo boy, and we took him to Lima to show the geography of Peru. I filmed for a week in the rainforest where he lived and then took him over the Andes in a truck to Lima and had him in my son's school setting. That was a documentary, and that was my first taste of the rainforest, the Amazon. And I had a number of other assignments, and I fell in love with the rainforest. It was fascinating, fascinating.

So, I took every opportunity I could to go over. I've been to the Amazon area at least thirty times over the years, and now I lead groups. I've taken rainforest courses down there with experts. Read all the books. Wonderful. Just fascinating experience.

MEH: One other question. Looking back, what do you think is the significance of Black Mountain as an educational venture? Or what do you think made it work or not work?

EW: For me?

MEH: In general, or for you, both.

EW: Well, for me it worked because it gave me a very in depth experience of culture. I mean arts, all the arts that I would never have really had any contact with, were very intense at Black Mountain. So, you got involved, whether you were a painter or not, you were involved. It was—You know Werklehre, for example—going out

walking with Bill Reed on a Sunday, and he suddenly finds an old shoe full of moss and fungus. "Wow," you know, he says, "this is great!" I said, "Well, yeah, but you need the other shoe." "No, no, it's for Werklehre" and then, of course, I would get a whole lecture on what he felt was Werklehre, you know. All the arts students were into Werklehre. One of my favorite stories is, I guess it was a student named Keck [Herter]. What his first name? Well, anyway, his grandmother came down in a chauffeur-driven car. At the end of Lee Hall there was a big freight elevator that we used to move furniture. That's how we got things up and down, heavy things. The kind of elevator where you had two ropes. You'd pull the rope, and it'd move, then you'd pull the other rope to stop, and there was a little gate at the end of the corridor that lifted up and you could step off. Well, I was there one day and heard the elevator. Of course, you always want to see what's coming up, and here was this head of this old lady with a choker collar coming up, leaning on the cane, and a chauffeur working the rope. And let her off. She went to visit Everit in his classroom. She took the whole art class to the car parts dump in Asheville and stood there with the chauffeur loading the trunk of this big limousine with junk that the kids were getting. Gears and pieces of things. And she stood there explaining to the junk dealer, who was trying to keep tabs of all these things, what Werklehre was all about. It was a fabulous scene. It was the kind of a scene that would make a part of great movie.

So, Werklehre was part of everybody's experience, whether you were an artist or not. And music, the same way. We had some fabulous concerts. Of

course, when Jalowetz came, we had more and so you didn't have to be a musician or interested specially in music to be involved. You were involved.

Do you want to hear about how I learned to play the oboe? [LAUGHS]

MEH: Sure.

EM: They were doing a Stravinsky thing, I don't know, I can't remember exactly who it was, one of these very abstract musical things, and they were going to put it on for May Day. And they needed an oboe part, so Leslie Katz brought back an oboe from Baltimore at Christmas vacation, and he gave it to me and some music and some beginner's scales and stuff and a kerosene heater and a stand, and they put me in one of the most remote houses on the campus, and I was to learn the oboe. I'm not a musician, and I tried and I tried. Finally, it was getting into March, and they figured well, he's not going to be able to play the oboe. So, they hired somebody from Asheville to come out to estimate whether anything could be done with me. He took one look at the oboe and lit a cigarette and blew into the bell and smoke came out of the cracks! It was an old military oboe that had been through the Civil War, I guess. So, it wasn't only me, you know. I share the blame with the oboe.

So, finally they decided if I could learn to play A-flat that they would work around, and I could participate. Well A-flat on my sheet was a note and a big loop and another note and a big loop. It was all A-flat. I sat next to Leslie, who played the flute, and had my oboe reed in my mouth, getting soft. He would hit me and I would put my fingers on the keys to play, and he'd hit me again and I would play A-flat loud and clear, and then he'd hit me and I'd stop, and he'd hit me and I'd

play it again—all the way across the page. And that was it. And I toured with the orchestra around North Carolina playing A-flat.

MEH: Besides Leslie.

EW: Yeah, right. So, anyway, you have experiences like that. What other college would you have experiences like that? It just was a very close, intimate place of learning. And learning wasn't all in the classroom. Sitting next to Albers at dinner, you know, and walking with somebody on a hike and that kind of thing.

MEH: What do you remember about meals at Black Mountain?

EW: Meals were good.

[IRRELEVANT TECHNICAL AND INTERIM REMARKS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

EW: I don't think I have very much profound to say about meals. I thought they were good. In fact, I thought they were excellent. I remember sitting next to Albers. We were having oyster stew, and he was down at the bottom of the soup plate. He had a spoon, and he was going around and around, and there was sand in the bottom of the plate, and a big grin on his face, and he said, "Ah, ze Beach!" [LAUGHS] But of course we were all very fond of Rubye and—what's his name—Jack. Yeah, they were very, very well thought of by everybody. They did a very good job, with a lot of variety. I never remember any hitches. They really were well organized.

The guy that I worked with on that pasture fence was a young black guy named Charlie, who was about my age, maybe a year or two younger than I was. But it took two to handle the rails and everything, so that's why they hired me. And, you know, at the foot of the hill there, there was a lake and it had a little raft

out there, so one afternoon when we were quitting, I said to Charlie, "Well, let's take a swim." We were all hot and sweaty. "I don't think so." Finally, I talked him into it, and we were in our underwear—shorts—on the float, and a car was coming down the dirt road. I looked around, and I heard a splash, and Charlie was gone. And then I didn't see him. I had no idea what happened to him. Finally, finally, I spotted him. He had came up in the bushes, screened from everything, and this car went by. Finally, I went in and asked him whether he knew the guy or something. "No," he said, "but blacks don't swim in this lake." He didn't want to be seen.

You know, I really didn't have too many experiences—I thought the South, you're going to see blacks, you know, lynched on every tree. But I found the people in the South were very much like the people in the North but with a different accent. But their concerns were all the same. I never got picked up by blacks because they didn't have cars. Whenever I tried to bring it up, I didn't get any anger or anything. I just got indifference or—"Naah, they're okay," you know, that kind of stuff.

This farmer I told you about who was very literate. He said that they almost lost their farm, but they sold part of it to two black families. One was in the insurance business and the other was some other—oh, an undertaker. And they had money. And he said, "Without them they would have gone under," but they resented it, resented that the blacks had the money. But not to the point of being angry or anything. It's just the way life is. "We came close to losing our farm."

When I tried to bring it up with him, he just laughed at me. He knew exactly—You know, he was sharp. He knew exactly what I was after, being from the Bronx, and that I wanted some dirt [AUDIOTAPE ONLY SECTION BEGINS] about the way they treated the blacks. But he just laughed it off. He said, "Naw, it's not like you think." And it wasn't.

But, anyway, Charlie then worked in the kitchen when I was there, and I tried to renew my contact, but he would have nothing to do with me.

MEH: Well, I'm sure that he realized that a black in the South, you know—that he had to be careful.

EW: Oh, yeah, that was obvious. It was a disappointment to me, but I understood it. But I can't think of anything else about the kitchen. [AUDIOTAPE ONLY SECTION ENDS]

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2.]

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]