

Interviewee: RICHARD BISHOP  
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

**MEH:** [GIVES IDENTIFICATION. TECHNICAL COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED. AUDIO AT BEGINNING PICKS UP BACKGROUND NOISE.] Richard, you came first to Black Mountain in the summer of 1951?

**RB:** Yeah, I think that's right. Yeah, '51.

**MEH:** How did you hear about the college?

**RB:** Actually I hadn't heard about it. I was with a friend who had heard about it, and it's one of the places we stopped. And didn't stay any length of time. It's just I got very attracted to it.

**MEH:** That was before you went down for the summer session.

**RB:** Yes.

**MEH:** Who was the friend?

**RB:** A guy by the name of Bill Miller that was in graduate school at the University of Chicago with me, and his—I don't think he ever took any further interest in Black Mountain. He was one of those guys that had been around a lot and knew about it and was curious about it.

**MEH:** So you went down to visit.

**RB:** Yeah. Well, we were on a—we were just out traveling, and ended up there, and I didn't, basically didn't start finding out about the place until I got there, because he hadn't talked that much about it. It was just a place that he wanted to see.

**MEH:** You were traveling around by car?

**RB:** Traveling by car, yeah.

**MEH:** So you decided to go back for the summer session?

**RB:** Yeah. I was very anxious to go back. I was getting very dissatisfied with the University of Chicago.

**MEH:** You were in undergraduate school there?

**RB:** No, I was actually a graduate student in theology, but it was— It was a good school. It just was—I wasn't really meant for the ministry, I guess, and even though the teachers there were wonderful, it was not something I wanted to continue on with. And I had a history of being pretty dissatisfied with education in general and was—always thought about that there ought to be a better process for teaching people. That was, I think at least intellectually, the attraction for Black Mountain.

**MEH:** Were you one of the GIs?

**RB:** No, I wasn't. In fact, I was—it was during the Korean War, I guess, when I went down there, and I was exempt at that point.

**MEH:** Had you gone to the University of Chicago for your undergraduate?

**RB:** No, I had gone to Cornell College out in Iowa. I had gotten a bachelor's degree. Put four years in out there. Partly what got me turned off to

schools, at least to colleges, and I guess the reason I went to the University of Chicago was because it seemed like the right kind of school to maybe get an education. I certainly didn't get it in undergraduate school, even though there were a couple of good teachers. But anyway, it's a long time ago.

**MEH:** Are you from Iowa? Are you from the Midwest?

**RB:** I was brought up in Chicago.

**MEH:** So you and Mary Alice went down for the '51 summer session, when Siskind and Callahan were there?

**RB:** Yes. Yeah. Is the timing right on that? It was '51 that I went down with my friend, and it was '52 that Mary and I went down, went back down, I think.

**MEH:** Were you there when Siskind and Callahan were there? That summer? Ben Shahn.

**RB:** Yes. Yes.

**MEH:** That was the summer of '51.

**RB:** Does that make sense? Yeah, that's right, because I graduated—That's right. I started the University of Chicago in '50, and it was the following spring, so that's right. You're right about that.

**MEH:** What attracted you to the college?

**RB:** But Mary didn't go with me that year, in '51.

**MEH:** Oh, she didn't?

**RB:** No.

**MEH:** Because I had her on the list as having been there.

**RB:** That was the following year she went, we went down. We got married in '51, and went down in '52.

**MEH:** What I had, and we'll check with her, I had you both there in the summer of '51, and then I had you going back in the spring of '52.

**RB:** No, that's definitely not right.

**MEH:** Okay. Well, I'll let you tell me. But you did—

**RB:** I was down there three times. The first time I went by myself. Then Mary and I went down twice after that.

**MEH:** So you did go for the summer of '51.

**RB:** That must have been when I was there although, as I say, I was just visiting and I didn't really get— You know, I wasn't involved in the program so I didn't really get, I didn't really get to know a lot of people.

**MEH:** What attracted you to the college?

**RB:** Well, basically I guess that it wasn't a college. That it was sort of a community of scholars and none of the awful things that I'd gotten, found distasteful in these alumni associations and a lot of formal procedures and that sort of thing. And not much attention to real, to real learning. And certainly very little attention to the physical side of life, the crafts and architecture and work and things like that, which were what I was interested in. So it wasn't hard to be attracted to it. I was also sort of searching around for what I wanted to do with my life, and I'd given up on the, being involved in the ministry in any way. And Mary and I both had been thinking about living in the country, having a farm and following a

sort of decentralist lifestyle, trying to have our own gardens and things like that. I'd had a fair amount of experience with that when I was a kid, and I found that's what I was most attracted to. We had a family farm down in central Missouri that I spent summers at and really loved that area and that kind of lifestyle. And was always into building and various kinds of physical activities as well as intellectual. But I didn't really start getting an education until I got to the University of Chicago—in any serious way, and it really woke me up in a lot of ways. And—Because Black Mountain looked like the perfect kind of school in that there were—It was evident that there was real intellectual inquiry going on there, and serious people. And I thought seriously about moving down to that area initially, but that didn't prove to be very practical. And I don't know that I really met anybody that first year that I was down there that—

**MEH:** Going back, the first—I'll have to check my records, we'll compare notes. The summer that I had you actually registered as a student—and, of course, you may have thought you were visiting, and they may have put your name down as a student. The summer that Siskind and Callahan were there, and Motherwell and Shahn, let's see who else was there that summer—Lou Harrison—you didn't take any courses with any of them that summer? You were just visiting?

**RB:** Yeah. For sure.

**MEH:** How long did you visit?

**RB:** It was a couple of weeks, but there was some traveling around in between. It's been a long time since I've even thought about that, and I don't even remember where we stayed.

**MEH:** Do you have any memories whatsoever of that particular summer, or of any of these people?

**RB:** The only person I spent any time talking to was the librarian.

**MEH:** Nell Rice?

**RB:** Nell Rice, yeah. Probably talked to Wes Huss, but I don't remember anything specifically about that.

**MEH:** So, you left then and went back to Chicago at that point? After that visit?

**RB:** Yeah, I had intended to go back to graduate school. Took off the spring quarter and intended to be back. And I guess I had—Yeah, I had met Mary just before I left, four weeks or something like that, and was attracted to her and wanted to get back and see her and kept in touch with her. But anyway, there was—it was a fairly visit-type trip. There was no thought about school or being there for that part of it.

**MEH:** So you went back to Chicago, and Mary was in Chicago?

**RB:** She lived in the suburbs of Chicago, and—when did we get married? We got married that fall. Is that right? God, you're going to have to get all that from her.

**MEH:** We'll compare notes and get all of that straightened out. But then you went back in the spring for the spring semester.

**RB:** Yes. We went back down in the spring.

**MEH:** Both of you?

**RB:** Both of us, yeah. Yeah. We were—She was pregnant. We were planning on getting down there and having the baby down there. So I guess we probably went down in April, something like that. Must have been.

**MEH:** With whom did you take classes then?

**RB:** I'm not sure that I took any classes at all that summer. I must have. I don't know. Do you have registration records?

**MEH:** Probably somewhere. Did you take Olson's—?

**RB:** What I spent most of the time doing is working on the Work Program and helping run the farm and doing a lot of the milking.

**MEH:** Who was farming then?

**RB:** I can't remember the name of the guy.

**MEH:** Was it Trayer? Had Trayer left? Moles?

**RB:** Yeah, it was Trayer.

**MEH:** Trayer. What was—

**RB:** I think. Was that right? Was it—Trayer was the guy that was in charge of it, I guess. But there was a hired local guy that—

**MEH:** Penley, by any chance?

**RB:** Running the farm. And, yeah, Mary will remember the name because she got to know them really well. At that point it was a pretty good farm.

**MEH:** What was it producing?

**RB:** A good-sized dairy herd. It was producing all the milk that the school needed, and there was some beef cattle. I don't think there were any

crops produced except to feed the cattle—corn, corn silage and hay. But they did have a big garden that was pretty productive, and don't remember—lots of strawberries and potatoes and things that grow well down there. And they had a fair amount of equipment and it was—it seemed to be working pretty well at that point. I'm not sure what else happened. I know I remember sitting in on a lot of seminars with—Olson came back that summer, and that was pretty exciting. And Mary took a couple of courses. She can tell you about that. She took some weaving classes. I don't know whether I got started with an architecture course that summer or not. I might very well have.

**MEH:** Who would have been teaching architecture?

**RB:** Williams.

**MEH:** Paul Williams?

**RB:** Yeah. Him. Thinking of Sherwood [PH] was that summer or the following summer. Probably that summer.

**MEH:** In the spring, did you take Olson's class?

**RB:** I must have. Yeah. Yeah, I must have taken a class. He was the most attractive person to me down there.

**MEH:** Why was that?

**RB:** I don't know. He just, you know—easy guy to talk to, had a lot to say, and took a personal interest in all the students, and it was— There were probably other students that I was talking to at that point that were also



most interested in him. [TELEPHONE RINGS] Tommy Jackson was there that summer, and I got to know him really well. [INTERRUPTION]

**MEH:** Now we were talking about—

**RB:** I just—I spent a lot of time with Joel Oppenheimer, I remember, that summer. A lot of dreaming about building buildings. And certainly that was part of the reason for being interested in Olson, I think, because that's what Joel was most interested in. I think that was the summer he got married too. We were involved in that wedding. Of course, we had—our first child came while we were down there which was exciting. We were—I remember that summer we were living in the Lodge, right across from the Dining Hall.

**MEH:** Can you describe Olson as a person?

**RB:** Well, he was a big bear-like person. He was, you know, just completely, completely open and excited about everything he did, and you just couldn't talk with him without him giving you a lot of ideas and information and encouragement. Of course, he was really excited himself about the work he'd been doing in Mexico, in Yucatan, and had a whole lot of new ideas and theories. He took a lot of interest in the fact that I was at the University of Chicago, for some reason. I don't know why. In fact, he helped me with a—helped me prepare for a couple of comprehensive exams that I needed to take when I came back. The University of Chicago operated on a pretty radical procedure. That was part of why I was attracted to it—in which you took three or four courses, and then you took one comprehensive exam

over those courses, in a given area. And even though you got grades in the courses you took, they were just sort of guidelines for this comprehensive exam that really gave you credit for the area of study. And the comprehensive exam was given or developed by a committee, not by the specific teacher in the course. I mean, that was back when Hutchins was President of the University of Chicago and they were actually—they were giving degrees on the basis of how well you did with these comprehensive exams. And they were finding that people could get through to a Ph.D. often by the time they were eighteen or nineteen, because of that comprehensive exam system. I mean, you could take the comprehensive any time you wanted to, and people were qualifying for advanced degrees just on their own merit, which was certainly a radical approach—just on the merit of what they knew. There was both an oral and a written part of the comprehensive, so, so it was—It was a pretty exciting time at the University of Chicago. If it hadn't been in the middle of the city in the slums of South Chicago, and if I hadn't been involved in a dead-end theological process. Even though the teachers were great but there was constant pressure to go out into the ministry. And even though I tried that, I found it totally distasteful. And also it was a big help in trying to look—help me sort through what I was thinking about what I wanted to do with my life. So he—But he was that was with everybody. He was a real father-figure, friend, and teacher. And clearly the center of excitement at that time at Black Mountain.

**MEH:** What construction was going on then?

**RB:** They were finishing up the Science Lab. I worked on that some—not a lot, mostly some landscaping. I think the Studies Building was finished, although there probably was still some work on it. And—

**MEH:** Was the Science Building being built then or was that later?

**RB:** It was pretty much built. There probably was more work to do. I can't remember specifically, but it was being built. [INTERRUPTION]

**MEH:** So you, basically when you were there you were interested in the farming aspect of the college?

**RB:** Yeah. I wasn't interested in it from a vocational point of view. I was interested in that kind of lifestyle. And I was pretty interested in architecture and design but had never done any of it except, you know, except various jobs that I'd been on as a carpenter and builder. But I was definitely interested in experimental design and trying to do something that was different. Paul Williams was really, really a great guy to work with.

**MEH:** Was he teaching an architecture course?

**RB:** I'm pretty sure. Yeah, there definitely was a course, and he had a lot of ideas then and so, you know, made us all produce our own designs and—I can't remember just what, what else he was teaching, but maybe that was it, maybe just that one course. [INTERRUPTION]

**MEH:** So, okay, was Paul Williams teaching a course in architecture then?

**RB:** Yeah, he must have been. You know, one of the wonderful things about Black Mountain was you never felt like you were in a course. You were just

working with teachers. There was like no—you didn't sit in rows. You simply got together on whatever schedule seemed workable and kept talking or doing things. And there was no sense of start and stop about courses. There was a lot of talk that summer about the survival of the college, because it was really in trouble at that point. I think the biggest problem was they weren't drawing students, at least tuition-paying students anyway. There were people coming because of summer session because of the faculty members that were there they wanted to be with. But the winter, I guess the winter sessions were what had them worried. And I don't know how serious the debt was at that point, but it was serious.

**MEH:** Did you attend faculty meetings? Community meetings?

**RB:** As far as I know, I did. Again, there wasn't a lot of formality to any of that, and I can't remember that, you know, any of that, any of that formal faculty meeting. In fact, they made a big point of it not being a faculty but just a community of scholars and pretty much everybody was involved in the decision-making. I wish I could remember more about that, but that was certainly a very attractive part of the college.

**MEH:** What was Joel Oppenheimer like then?

**RB:** He was—had a lot of vitality and was a great person to talk to. He was interested in everything, wanting to explore things. We spent a lot of time looking, hiking around the place, looking at the possibilities for building. He was excited about poetry, of course, and I don't know that he was doing much writing at that point. But he was certainly a wonderful guy, and I was

very much attracted to him at that point. I don't—I'm just trying to remember whether he was there the second year when I went back. I think he must have been, and I tend to confuse things between those two years, so I'm not really sure of what, you know, just what the sequence was for that.

**MEH:** Did you—Why did you leave?

**RB:** Well, I was scheduled to get back to University of Chicago and start classes in, must have been September. And we had kept our apartment there and were planning on being, planning on being back for school. So—

**MEH:** And so—but you stayed for the '52 summer session when Kline was there and Tworokov was there? For the summer session, you stayed for that summer session.

**RB:** Yeah. Yeah.

**MEH:** Olson was there that summer, Huss, Wes Huss.

**RB:** [AFFIRMATIVE]

**MEH:** Did you have any interest in the arts, the things going on there, that sort of thing?

**RB:** Yeah, I found that all really interesting. Joe Fiore's paintings, exciting. Certainly the dance was wonderful. There were some theatre productions. I remember being involved in one or two of those.

**MEH:** Do you remember specifically?

**RB:** No, I don't. I don't remember what we were doing. Mary will probably remember that. There was a lot of music, of course

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

**MEH:** You were saying there was a lot of music?

**RB:** There was a lot of music, yeah. One of the things I'd learned the previous year was how to tune pianos, so I did help with keeping the pianos in shape that summer. I think it must have been that summer.

**MEH:** So you went back to the University of Chicago. Were you still interested in getting a degree in theology?

**RB:** Yes, I was, although I was tending toward trying to get a degree in, or to specialize in, an area like mythology rather than practical religion.

**MEH:** Was that Olson's influence at all?

**RB:** For sure. For sure. And—But my scholarship at the University of Chicago was there because I was supposedly training for the ministry, and as long as you're in training for the ministry, they paid all the costs pretty much, so— And—But I got very excited about courses. Amos Wilder, Thornton Wilder's brother, was teaching in Old Testament, and that got me started, I think, in mythology. Also some literature courses—I forget who was teaching those. They were very good. And I started reading everything I could find about history of Christianity and what went wrong. And started reading Tillich and existentialists and various people that I should have been introduced to much earlier. But anyway, the main advantage I took of

that, being at the university, was just to do a tremendous amount of reading and thinking about what life was and what I wanted to do.

**MEH:** Did you graduate?

**RB:** No. No, I didn't. I got roughly two years out of the three in—two years spread over three years. Four semesters, five semesters, I guess, I got in. Or five, is that right? They had three quarters a year, so—No, I got six in, I guess, so I was roughly two-thirds of the way through. There again, you know, the degree was dependent on meeting all the field responsibilities and preparing for the ministry. That was where I found I just couldn't proceed. And also it was getting really intolerable living in a small apartment in South Chicago, with two kids—two babies—and that was not where I wanted to be. We had started exploring around the Midwest, trying to find a piece of land and someplace we could live. And it was utterly hopeless. The Midwest was like the East is now. It was just totally out of reach. Everything was very expensive. Basically couldn't make a living at anything other than one of the professions and [UNINTEL WORD] to own property anyway. So it was increasingly attractive to get out of there and get someplace like North Carolina.

**MEH:** Did you go back to North Carolina?

**RB:** Well, other than to Black Mountain, no.

**MEH:** Is that when you came to Vermont? To this area?

**RB:** Yeah, yeah. The last year we were down at Black Mountain, it was pretty clear that the college was going to fold up, and then, in fact, that was

going to be their last year. They hadn't made a clear decision, but it seemed like there was no hope of it being there, and there was no reason other than Black Mountain to live in that area. And Tommy Jackson was our closest friend at that point, and he was ready to move back up to Vermont at that point. Not "back to Vermont." He lived in Boston, but he wanted, he also wanted to go find land and live, live in the country. And he had just gotten a small inheritance from his mother, who had died, I guess, and we took—Early that summer we took an exploratory trip up to Vermont just to take a look at it, and there was a lot of idealism. We were talking about coming to Vermont and establishing a Black Mountain North school, you know, and all that kind of stuff. And so he and I made a fast trip up to Vermont just to see it. I'd never been in that part of the world, and it turned out to be just totally fascinating, and Vermont was, you know, was like one big park for someone who had been brought up in Chicago. And it was just absolutely gorgeous. And this was before the thruways and before the big ski resorts. And there were just farms every place that could be purchased for little or nothing. And we went back to Black Mountain pretty much convinced we would pack up soon and head for the north and find a farm and buy it.

**MEH:** What do you mean "we went back to Black Mountain"?

**RB:** Well, Tommy and I came up to New England, just he and I. Mary was still down there. And the intention was just to make a fast trip to Vermont and



then head back down again to finish up the summer down there. Decide what to do.

**MEH:** Now I'm really confused. That was the summer of '52?

**RB:** That must have been '53.

**MEH:** '53. So you went back in the summer of '53?

**RB:** Yeah. I went back.

**MEH:** Oh, okay, I didn't realize that.

**RB:** Oh, okay. I thought that was clear. That was three years in a row that we were there—that I was there, anyway. Two years that Mary was there.

**MEH:** So you went back for the summer in 1953.

**RB:** Right. We pretty much went back—moving out of the University of Chicago at that point. And so we had broken our connection with the University of Chicago, moved down there as a first step of trying to find what we were going to do with our lives, thinking about the possibility of being there at Black Mountain if we could, you know, if it was workable.

**MEH:** Did you register as students that summer?

**RB:** Yeah, we were registered as students, and if the registration system hadn't broken down completely [LAUGHS] by that time— I'm not sure that it hadn't. And spent a lot of time working on the farm again that summer, and it was—that was beginning to collapse too. And, and Olson was, of course, there, and beginning to be very seriously concerned about the college and what was going to happen. I don't think he knew what he wanted to—where he was going to end up with his life either. He had a

wife and a small child, and, you know, they didn't have any place to go either at that point. So there was a lot of exploring, and that was what was going on. Also a lot of talk about why the college failed—just sort of academic, but very interesting.

**MEH:** What were some of the theories? I mean what was sort of the take on things then?

**RB:** I don't—I'm not really sure. You know, on the surface it was pretty obvious that the reason it was failing was because there wasn't anybody there that wanted to go out and spend their life touring around the country finding students—which is how they got them in the early years. Just did a lot of outreach and finding those occasional students that really were dissatisfied and wanted to come to a place like Black Mountain. And none of the faculty were—they were either involved in their own arts and crafts stuff and didn't want to do that kind of stuff, understandably. And ,of course, there wasn't any draw for students in the region. So it was just a pretty hopeless situation. They were clearly suffering from the lack of, you know, a formal kind of program where there was an admissions department, which nobody wanted anyway. And then the alumni association to support the—and do the fundraising and things like that. And I felt (?) a sort of resignation on the part of the staff that were still there, that "well, that was, this was the inevitable consequences of a, you know, of a community of scholars," that, you know, it would live itself out and have to go someplace else, or break up into smaller groups. And it

was not a bad thing, necessarily. Nobody wanted to be—wanted to feel, I think, intellectually anyway, they were attached to a piece of property, because the sort of philosophy of the college was that it wasn't the property that was important. It was the academic stuff and the property was just there to support that. I don't know, it was kind of, pretty sad, to me, because it—after just discovering what seemed like a wonderful community, it was breaking up. People weren't really interested in the physical side of the school, which of course needed a lot of attention—maintenance, running the farm, that sort of thing. So— And the winters were getting pretty bleak, I guess, in the sense of not being, not seeing any group of students, new group of students on the horizon that could justify the staff and pay for the staff. Everybody's salary had been dropped to practically nothing. At least that was the impression I had anyway. And so it was pretty clear. There weren't any obvious choices about, what was going to happen. And I guess it was in the winter of—it must have been in the winter of that year that Olson finally closed it down. Is that timing right?

**MEH:** It was actually—it actually lasted through— The campus closed in the fall of '56. And then it kept some programs going through '57. So it really officially closed in '57.

**RB:** Okay, so it was, it was a span of time there.

**MEH:** It was functioning on a very small level. So when you came back, did you come directly to Vermont or New Hampshire from Black Mountain?

**RB:** Yeah. Yeah. We loaded up all our possessions, and Tommy had a caravan. Tommy had a truck with all his things on it, and we had our car with a big trailer, and we slowly made our way to Vermont. Slowly, because we couldn't travel very fast with our old vehicles.

**MEH:** And did you settle together initially?

**RB:** Yeah. We came up, found a place to rent in Putney, Vermont, for a few months while we were looking for a place to buy. And then ended up buying a 150-acre farm in South Royalton, Vermont, which was just an amazing acquisition—a house, a barn and all the animals. And absolutely beautiful place. We bought the whole farm for four thousand dollars. Tommy, Tommy put in—Tommy put in 15 hundred, I think. I borrowed five hundred dollars from my father, and we held a mortgage for the other two thousand with the owner, which was an indication of how ridiculous the situation was. I mean, the owner had only owned it for a year or two at that point, and had bought it just for logging. And we looked at least another dozen farms in the same price range, so it was—it was a totally different world at that point. But absolutely amazing and wonderful.

**MEH:** How did you earn your living?

**RB:** The first year I struggled along doing piano tuning and repair and made some money that way. And then after the first winter, that seemed like that just wasn't going to work so I took a school-teaching job up in Plainfield, Vermont, teaching high school. Something I vowed I would never do in my life. My father had been a high-school teacher and principal. And, you

know, it was the last thing I wanted to do, but— But anyway, I started a new vocation.

**MEH:** Is that how you've earned your living? What have you done? Did you continue to teach?

**RB:** I ended up teaching for—teaching high school for nine years, then went off to the University of New Hampshire and got a doctorate in biochemistry, largely paid for by grants. I taught in college for four years after that

**MEH:** Where did you teach?

**RB:** I taught at Franklin Pierce College in New Hampshire. I taught one year at the University of New Hampshire at the end of graduate school and then took a job with Franklin Pierce.

**MEH:** Why did you not continue to teach?

**RB:** Well, I hated college teaching. I should have known better. Graduate school was great. The research was wonderful. Being at the university was fine. But before I went there, I was pretty much—I was totally fed up with teaching at the high school level. And Mary and I were thinking about—again—packing up and moving to Canada or someplace, someplace more civilized. And then this offer to go to graduate school showed up, and a couple of my friends were there, and that seemed pretty exciting as a chance to, again, stop and think about what I would do with my life. And it gave me a wonderful chance to do that. The research in biochemistry at that point was just utterly exciting. It was the point with DNA was first being worked with seriously, and a lot of research involved

trips to MIT and Harvard and places like that. so it was a great experience. But I should have known better than to go off to teach at college, because it so reminded me of all the bad— bad things about education. One of those schools where, you know, like most small colleges, students were coming there because they couldn't get into Harvard or Yale. And they were determined to get their degree at any cost. And the parents were essentially buying the degrees for them. It was like really ugly. I just—not what I wanted to be involved in, so—

**MEH:** So what did you do then?

**RB:** Proceeded to get thrown out after organizing a teachers' union and trying to do what I could to change the college, which was hopeless. And they had to either give me tenure or get rid of me. So it was pretty obvious what was going to happen. But I was already going anyway, at that point. I had been—I had moved up to—we had moved up to this location and had been involved in organizing a large commune on a 400-acre site, and that was pretty exciting.

**MEH:** Where was that?

**RB:** It was right here [UNINTEL] in Acworth. It was pretty much all [UNINTEL WORD] on this road, all the way from—

**MEH:** Is it still a commune?

**RB:** No, no. That broke—That lasted five or six years and then broke up, and at that point I started looking for another vocation and got involved in computer work, and did some technical training, some manufacturing, ran

a computer store, various things. That got me through until '87 or '88, and that began to fall apart as an industry, at least—And I went—and again I started looking for another vocation, something a little more likeable. And got started working for a company that was developing housing for low-income families in Fitchburg, Mass and spent four years running a grant program building low-income housing.

**MEH:** In this area?

**RB:** It was in Fitchburg, Mass.

**MEH:** Now did you move there then?

**RB:** No, we lived here, and I commuted down. It was about an hour away from here.

**MEH:** Okay. I was thinking of Maine.

**RB:** Yeah, right on the border of Massachusetts and... It was a self-help program in which groups of families were put together to work at building their own houses as a group. It's a national program that the Department of Agriculture runs. And a little later on I got a chance to move up here and run a similar program in Springfield. And I did that for—tried to do that on a part-time basis for—because I was trying to get free to live here and work on this place. And I also had a couple of my own building projects—a house that I was building for—it was a spec house and things like that. So just in the last few months I've gotten out of that job and back into being retired again. But, I credit Black Mountain with, if nothing else, the inspiration and the encouragement to live in the world without having to be

tied to a permanent profession to survive, which I was looking for before I got there, of course, but finding very little, you know, very little encouragement. And, and very few other people that were, you know, even willing to try living that way.

**MEH:** I think now it's more acceptable that you have several professions in a lifetime, and you don't— But at that point you were expected—I think Black Mountain gave people the knowledge that they could have an alternative lifestyle to the conventional you have a job, you keep it all your life. You add your benefits up and that's it.

**RB:** Yeah. Yeah, I don't know where that came from, but it certainly came from a sense of community where people knew that if everybody worked together they could make a good living, find exciting things to do. And their own, it was very difficult. In any event, we were—It got us up here, and it's been a happy existence.

**MEH:** Well, essentially it was the trigger that determined what you did, where you lived.

**RB:** Yeah. Yeah. But it's also just a memory that, you know, afterwards that when you get caught in a profession like I almost did at teaching high school, that it didn't have to be that way. And then I met—we met Olson. He came up to visit us a couple times. We went down to visit him. He was always a...

**MEH:** And then maybe talk to the two of you together—I'll talk to her.

**[END OF INTERVIEW]**



**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**