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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

**MEH:** [IDENTIFICATION GIVEN] The first time that you went to Black Mountain, Sue, do you recall how you arrived there? How you traveled?

**SW:** I visited Black Mountain before I went there. At that time it was very eccentric because my uncle who was a pilot and who had the use of a plane flew us there. Everybody really thought that it was most strange to have me arrive at the school by my uncle's plane. I was so taken with the school I immediately decided that's where I was going to go. All the other choices that we had made I was going to forget about.

**MEH:** Were you in high school at the time?

**SW:** Yes, I was in high school. I remember meeting M.C. Richards, the first one I met there and trudging around the school with her. It was just so exciting for me. I thought that it was gonna be my new home.

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

**SW:** Oh, I absolutely do. When I was in high school, my art teacher in my senior year in high school was an artist. I'd said to my father that I didn't even care about going to college. I just wanted to be a painter and that was that. He said, well, that he felt that I absolutely must go to college and that therefore we would look

for one with a good art department. We looked at Bennington and Bard. Then Black Mountain was on the list. My old art teacher Aaron Kurzen, he had suggested Black Mountain. We talked about Albers. That's why I went there was really to study with Albers. [TECHNICAL COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

**MEH:** You knew at the time that you wanted to study art.

**SW:** Absolutely.

**MEH:** What about Black Mountain appealed to you that you didn't find in these other schools?

**SW:** Well, first of all, I very much wanted to be in a small school. I was very impressed by the liveliness of the environment there. It just suited me. My parents were creative people, and I grew up in an environment that was kind of lively and all about writing and painting and so on. I felt very comfortable there.

**MEH:** You went back to high school. You finished high school. Where did you go to high school?

**SW:** At the Dalton School in New York.

**MEH:** So, you had been introduced to Progressive education.

**SW:** Yes.

**MEH:** Atypical schools. But you didn't go directly to Black Mountain when you finished high school.

**SW:** I went that following summer to art school in Paris. In that era, if you were going to be a painter, you were supposed to go to Paris. It was the end of that year that I did this. I went to the Académie Julian and the Académie de la Grande

Chaumiere for drawing. That was just a summer. I went the end of the school year and came back to start Black Mountain in September.

**MEH:** What was the Académie Julian like at that time?

**SW:** Well, it was very formal. I was this little teenager, and I'd go in these rooms. These models would be there. You'd be drawing and painting. For drawing, the models take long poses. I would rip through a drawing and then there it'd be the same thing. So, I'd move around the room and draw it from a different place. But it was very formal. My French wasn't that good. I'd just had high school French. So, most of the time I didn't know what was going on very much. I was very interested in seeing Paris and so on, but I was in art school all day. Then we'd go and draw in the evening at the Académie de La Grande Chaumiere.

**MEH:** At that age you take those things seriously. If you're there to do it, that's what you do.

**SW:** My parents had sent me there to be watched over by an adult who was taking several teenagers to Paris. She was very intent that I should just be in school. Of course, I wanted to go to the Louvre and look at painting, and I wanted to wander. She was very serious that I had to be in art school all day.

**MEH:** So you stayed through the summer. Then you came back and enrolled at Black Mountain.

**SW:** Right.

**MEH:** Albers had returned. He had been on a sabbatical. But he was there.

**SW:** He was there. He was there, and I was taking all of the Albers classes. Then I was taking other things, too. I took French and I think writing and other things.

Dance. I took dance, and it was funny because I was kind of a handicapped person. I took dance with Hazel Larsen, who had had polio and didn't walk –

**MEH:** She was in the class, not teaching it.

**SW:** She was in the class and also others who really weren't dancer sorts. It was wonderful because that was the student of Black Mountain, that you could go in, and if all you could do was wave your arms around, you waved your arms around. We studied with Betty Jennerjahn. She was a wonderful dancer and a very nice, easy teacher for us.

**MEH:** That was typical, I think, of the Black Mountain experience, that you didn't have to be professional or gifted to try a thing.

**SW:** I know there was so much dialogue between the different parts of the school. That was one thing that was very lovely there because kind of the best things that happened at Black Mountain happened at the end of the day in the dining hall. You'd sit around and you'd be sharing thoughts with people in other disciplines. You'd get in these very intensive dialogues with people who were serious in another form. So, that was very exciting. You'd be talking with poets and with people in architecture, people in all different disciplines. That was a very exciting sharing we had.

**MEH:** Let's go back to the dance class. Where was it held and what sort of things did you do?

**SW:** It was in the dining hall. It was a modern dance class. Betty had us do whatever we could do of what everybody was doing. As I say, some of us didn't have that mobility. So, we just did what part of it worked for us. That was very, very sweet.

**MEH:** Did you think in terms of a performance?

**SW:** I didn't particularly, but if there had been one, and I had been asked, I would have done so.

**MEH:** You don't remember a performance that you did.

**SW:** No, no, I don't. But I also enjoyed the music aspect of Black Mountain. I was in the chorus. My family couldn't believe it because they never thought I was musical at all. I really thought it was great because I enjoyed so much singing the B-minor Mass of Bach's and so on. I could read the score and so on, but my voice wasn't anything to write home about. I thought it didn't matter. I thought nobody could hear me because there were so many people. Then they would call out, "The only one I hear is Susan." I thought, "Oh, no." Then I'd get very shy.

**MEH:** Who was teaching?

**SW:** That was – I have to think. Now, you know I'm going back a few years here.

**MEH:** Was it Charlotte Schlesinger – Bimbus?

**SW:** Yes, it was Bimbus and she was great. She was really wonderful. My roommate at Black Mountain was – oh, this is terrible that I draw a blank like this. She was a music student, and so she was very knowledgeable and had a very beautiful voice. So, I would try to sit near her, and then I could kind of slide in on her sound. It was special.

**MEH:** Did this happen in the dining hall also in terms of rehearsals?

**SW:** Yes, yes. Most of these things did happen in the dining hall.

**MEH:** What do you remember about the dining hall space?

**SW:** Well, it felt a very generous space. Of course, when it was mealtimes, and there were tables and everything there, that was one thing. Then you'd clear it all out. It was a very big and generous space. It felt open looking out over the lake which was very beautiful. You could sit out on the porch, really hanging over the lake or inside, depending on how you felt about it or who was sitting at the table. It was just a lovely community for me. I felt a part of everything.

**MEH:** You were – going back to mealtimes. Students have said that mealtimes were so important. How were things organized and why do you think that was the case?

**SW:** Well, as I said in your classes – my special study was in art, but it was a sharing with the rest of the school. It was a small enough school so that you knew everybody pretty well, but it was the sharing of thoughts. It was the time that you'd come together with people that you didn't see in your classes and made this sense of community. Also, this happened on the work program because you might be working at the farm, you might be working cleaning the hall, you might be working in the kitchen. Whatever you were doing, you were having a dialogue with students you didn't necessarily see in your classes. So, that was part of this larger community.

**MEH:** You took – I was looking at my records which aren't complete. They're really notes I've taken here and there – but I had written down that you took Albers drawing class, his color class and I didn't have design. There was one other class that you had taken with him. Going back, how did he conduct his drawing class?

**SW:** Well, it was a modern academic approach. There was a formality to it. He had developed a way of teaching that I guess came out of his experiences in the Bauhaus. For me, I was still a teenager and not about to listen to anybody really. Albers, for him you were the student. He was the teacher. There was one way to do things and that was his way. I felt a little rebellious about this. Of course, I went along with it, but I felt rebellious. So, during that time I was there, I didn't realize how much I was learning there. I thought there was more than one way to do things. He had this concept that as long as you were going to school, you were not an artist, you were a student. Of course, a lot of the students felt that they were already an artist with something to say. So, it was much more difficult than I was used to in my art learning, but it still stands me in good stead in the studio now. I was at Black Mountain with Bob Rauschenberg, who I had first met in Paris. Albers really picked on Bob because he felt that Bob had a strong personality, and he felt he had to get him in his more modest way. That he shouldn't consider himself already an artist. Bob was really trying to be a proper Albers student, but he was somehow always irritating Albers. So, that was funny.

**MEH:** I mean, Albers could really attack people.

**SW:** Oh, he did.

**MEH:** Did he really go after Bob?

**SW:** All of us. Everybody. Even his favorite students. When they were feeling confident that all was well, that's when the axe would fall. He would reduce everybody to tears at some point. I remember, for instance, Ruth Asawa was in my class. She was a big Albers favorite. Her work was absolutely beautiful. She

drew so beautifully that it was breathtaking, but it was time for her to take her fall. I remember we were all so startled that we could all get in trouble very easily, but we didn't know that Ruth could get in trouble, too. But it was very curious that he could really teach you how to look and draw and the connection between – from eye to mind to hand. It was very wonderful. Drawing is something I've already really loved, and I feel I got so much from that. We had a woman who was the dietician for the school. Her English wasn't very good. She came from Friesland [PH] and she decided to take Albers class. So, she came to the class, and she didn't always understand what he was talking about. I remember he gave this problem about negative space. You were supposed to go home and make your work and bring it in and put it on the floor. All this work would go on the floor. Then he would suddenly pick on something and blow up and make a big scene. Piet, she hadn't understood what he meant by negative space, so what she'd done, she'd taken Life magazine and cut out the things between the figures in the photographs or something. Suddenly, he took off at Piet. He didn't even realize it was her work. I think it wouldn't have been picked up if he had realized. But she was so shocked and alarmed. That was like him. I mean, he had this way that he was the authority and that was the way it was. But as I say, you learned so much from him. He had such a formality. It was amazing.

**MEH:** What do you think about that way of teaching?

**SW:** Well, I've been teaching a lot of my life, and I take none of that with me because – I teach very differently. But, as I say, I learned a great deal from it. Then, I



don't think an American person growing up in my generation would ever really think like that. But it came out of a European background and so on. That was his way of really imparting what he had to teach, and, of course, that was very effective.

**MEH:** In the drawing class did you use models?

**SW:** Yes. We didn't always draw people. We could draw – I remember having a good deal of trouble trying to draw a jeep. We were all outside trying to draw this jeep and it might be cups and saucers. It could be anything.

Oh, now I remember. My roommate's name was Delores Fullman. She was a singer, as I said, and we persuaded her to come and pose for us. She was a very large person and voluptuous. She was not an artist, so she wasn't used to Albers' way. But he put her there, and she immediately became part of the furniture. He was talking to the class about Delores, and he said, "Now, I don't want to see any thin figures. This is a large woman. Look at these mountains and valleys." And he's gesturing and everything. Delores was looking more and more horrified and thinking she would never do this again. "And look at these breasts." She was so undone by this. Then we had a student who was a model who was a very thin person, and, of course, we had to hear all about seeing his bones, and so on. He was funny that way. Immediately, he'd forget that there was somebody listening to him describing them. That was a funny one.

**MEH:** In drawing, you weren't just doing abstract drawing. You were really drawing from visual images.

**SW:** Oh, yes, I found the other day two or three drawings from Black Mountain. I can show you. It's amazing they still exist because they're on newsprint. I have to figure out how to be able to keep them. No, it was really interesting how he taught drawing. I really carry a lot of that with me.

**MEH:** You took his color class.

**SW:** Yes.

**MEH:** The drawing class, most of the work was done in class, not out of class. Another thing I was going to ask you is materials. Did you supply your own materials? Did he supply them?

**SW:** We supplied our own material. [OVERTALK] Well, for drawing, of course, it was just paper. But for the color class, I remember that when I would go home on the holidays or something, I would be scrambling trying to find special papers and so on. I remember discovering places where you could find a great variety of special papers and so on. Also we did other kind of studies, leaf studies and so on. All kinds of things that were just around and about.

**MEH:** Going to the color class. How did he conduct that and what sorts of things did you do?

**SW:** Well, my memory isn't too enormously wonderful, but I remember doing some studies. For instance, we would do these vibration studies where you'd take complementary colors and you'd put them together in such a way as they would activate each other and the edges would vibrate and blur. I remember my eyes kind of circling in my head doing these vibration studies and so on. There's a

whole set of things. You do one after another. But we're going back fifty years so it's a little hard to tell you a lot of details.

**MEH:** You did that mostly on your own, the work or in class.

**SW:** Well, he'd give you a problem to do. He'd give you a basis of it. Then you'd go back and you'd work on it and bring it in the next day to the class.

**MEH:** There again you provided your own colored paper?

**SW:** Yes.

**MEH:** Do you remember any other students particularly who were in the class?

**SW:** Well, I think all the people who were there as artists – art students – Ruth Asawa and Pete Jennerjahn, who later became the teacher, and Si Sillman, who later taught Albers [tech?] classes. And, of course, Bob Rauschenberg.

**MEH:** Were these held down in the Studies Building in the lower level with the weaving shop?

**SW:** No, next to the weaving shop. It's another building.

**MEH:** A different building?

**SW:** It seems to me it was. Or could it have been in the Studies Building? I'm a little unclear about it.

**MEH:** I'm, not sure. They had put some of those FHA buildings down there at that point. Wartime housing buildings, so I'm not sure.

**SW:** Yes.

**MEH:** So, you took the drawing, you took the color and – I'll pull that piece of paper out in a few minutes – If you were doing the leaf studies, it would seem you took the design class.

**SW:** I guess I did, yes.

**MEH:** If you guess you did, you probably don't remember too much about it.

**SW:** No. I'm in a bit of a blur. I mean, one has a lot of experiences after that. It's a bit of a blur.

**MEH:** What do you think – with respect to Albers class – what do you think you carry besides the technique you learned in drawing? What do you think you've really carried with you that you learned from him?

**SW:** Well, I certainly learned a great deal about color. One thing that was surprising to me about color from his point of view was if you took your two colors you thought really didn't go together at all, that would be his idea of what best you should work with and to try to make – that there were no two colors that really couldn't get along. I don't know. You absorbed a great deal, and then it takes different forms as you go through your artist life.

**MEH:** Did you take classes other than art classes?

**SW:** Yes. I took some writing and I took French and I took, as I said, music and dance and, let's see what else did I take. It was interesting with the writing because we started out with Dahlberg, and I didn't enjoy that.

**MEH:** What was Dahlberg like?

**SW:** It seemed to me that he – he wasn't a good teacher for me. I always loved writing and I've always written, but to me it wasn't so amazing. But then, anyway, then we had Olson. Olson – he was scary for me. I'm five foot two and he's like a basketball player. He's enormously big and standing around the group with him, we'd all feel like little kids. It was funny, but he was very vibrant,

and it was really interesting. He was very critical and directive and everything, but he was very vibrant. I have a writer father so I had done a lot of reading and writing and so on and was very attuned to that, but still in all at the time I barely had touched eighteen, so I was very young. But it was meaningful to me. I didn't have him for very long, maybe not a full semester.

**MEH:** That year he was visiting one long weekend a month. M.C. was on sabbatical that year.

**SW:** Whatever it was, he made an impression on me.

**MEH:** It's hard for him not to. I recently saw a videotape of him and just the way he moved with his whole body, that enormous body, was amazing.

**SW:** Yes. It's amazing.

**MEH:** I'm going to take a pause because –

**SW:** I felt so badly I couldn't remember Delores' name. She was my roommate.

**MEH:** She was your roommate and also she was African-American. The college was integrated then, at least a little bit.

**SW:** A very little bit.

**MEH:** A very, very little bit. Did you – was that something you thought about consciously at the time?

**SW:** Well, I was aware of the difficulty because our nearest city was Asheville and it was segregated. It was difficult for us because we went everywhere with Delores. If you would go into town, you couldn't go to the movies together and so on. So, we'd go to the movies with Delores and we'd sit where black people sat. It was hard on her because she was from Chicago. So, it was hard for her to

be in a school in a segregated part of the world. So, I was most aware of that. That was a very special experience. Being a singer, she would go to church on Sunday, and she'd go to the black Baptist church in Asheville. We'd go with her, and I was astonished because I'm of a family that half of it was Episcopalian and the other half was Jewish. My idea of going to a church – I had never seen anything like black Baptist church in North Carolina. I mean, people were fainting right and left. The room was moving. You experienced all these amazing things that came from the voice of the minister. People in the aisles were carrying smelling salts and so on. The whole choir would faint, and you'd only hear Delores singing. That was an amazing experience for me. My parents were very concerned about my being in a Southern segregated part of the world because as a younger teenager I had been very involved with trying to make my high school hurry up and integrate itself. I had done community service in Harlem and worked with black children a great deal. My parents felt I was going to get in trouble there. Then, of course, when I had a black roommate, they were very concerned about it and concerned for her. When they came to visit, we were going to take this trip on down in the South. I wanted Delores to come with us. My father said, "Look, I don't want you to do that because you'll just make her troublesome situations. I mean every time we try to walk in a restaurant together or something, it will just be a mess." He said, "It's not for us. It's for her. I don't want you to do that." So, I was quite aware of that. But she survived North Carolina and went back to Chicago.

**MEH:** You haven't been in touch with her have you?

**SW:** I was for years. My grandmother lived in Chicago, so when I'd go out to visit my grandmother, I'd always visit Delores. She had hoped to become a more formal kind of singer, but it wasn't possible. She had a child very young, and she always sang in churches and choruses and so on, but she didn't have the professional involvement she had dreamed of when she was nineteen – eighteen, nineteen.

**MEH:** I interviewed her actually back in the early seventies. Then I lost track of her. I haven't been able to find her.

**SW:** Oh, a wonderful person. A really wonderful person. She had this daughter she named Trude after Trude Guermonprez.

**MEH:** Do you – that might be a way of finding out what happened to her.

**SW:** Yes, she came from a very large family. Her father was a postman. She had many brothers and sisters, and she taught me all their names. I think there were about twelve of them. It was important to me that I knew all their names.

**MEH:** Did you ever run into any problems when you went into town with Delores?

**SW:** Always.

**MEH:** How did people react?

**SW:** Well, if we would go into a department store, they would assume she was my maid. I mean, it was astonishing to me to be in a segregated town anyway. It was just astonishing. Very difficult. So we fast learned just to go to black places or else to not go into town.

**MEH:** You were welcome in black places.

**SW:** Yes, mostly. Yes, because we were with Delores. I don't think if we had just gone by ourselves. But, no, it was complicated. When I went back a couple of years ago for the exhibition I had in Asheville, I was amazed at the change in the town. I mean, it was so astonishing. When I was a student there, everybody was hostile to the school, I mean, not only over racial issues but in all ways. They thought of us as hippies and Communists and all kinds of nasty things. Everybody was hostile to the school. All you had to do was say you were at the school, and you were made uncomfortable. When I went back, everybody was so proud of the school. Asheville was so proud of this thing that had happened there. I just couldn't believe it. Our school and they had been so bad to us. I mean, for instance, when the physics and chemistry lab had the big fire, the fire department decided to go put out a brush fire instead of coming to help us with this building burning down. They arrived very late when it was already a *fait au complet*. You really felt the hostility to the school at that time.

**MEH:** Definitely Asheville has changed and definitely the South has changed in a way that actually is rather remarkable, but I wonder whether if a school like Black Mountain were to open there today, what the reaction would be. Certainly, segregation would not be the issue anymore. But a Bohemian lifestyle would still be an issue.

**SW:** Not the way it was then. No. No.

**MEH:** Not the way it was then. What do you think triggered that? Obviously, the integration situation – that in itself would trigger – but even before the college



integrated, it was perceived by the outside people to be a nudist colony, a Communist commune.

**SW:** Well, everything that made people uncomfortable. They were trying to live the conservative life. They thought of Black Mountain as being that way and, of course, it was so unlike their vision of us.

**MEH:** Were any local people that you recall that came to the college?

**SW:** I know there were but I wasn't so aware of it. I mean, I think even people came and took classes. There were some people. I found that out when I went down for my exhibition because I met people who had gone to take certain classes. But I don't remember that connection to town when I was there.

**MEH:** How did you get to the Baptist church in Asheville? Did you walk? You couldn't walk.

**SW:** No, no, no. It was a long, long way. There were people who had cars. We'd get together and jump in an old car.

**MEH:** Do you remember besides you and Bob who was part of the group that would have gone to church with Delores?

**SW:** I know that probably there were one or two others. I don't know who it might have been.

**MEH:** I think even today to go to a Southern Baptist church would be astounding.

**SW:** Oh, it was wonderful. It was wonderful.

**MEH:** A black Southern Baptist church.

**SW:** It was just so moving. It really was, so thrilling.

**MEH:** So, at Black Mountain, you said you studied language. Was that with Madame Goldowski?

**SW:** Yes, and it was very funny because I had just come from Paris. Even though I was only there a few months, I had just come from Paris. I'd been studying in high school, and then I had been studying there at the Alliance Française. Certainly, Madame Goldowski had a Russian accent, teaching us French. It was very strange. But she was very sweet. I just didn't want to lose the French that I had kind of worked on in Paris.

**MEH:** Did you take any science?

**SW:** No. I don't think I did. No, I didn't. I wish I had.

**MEH:** Max Dehn was away that year, wasn't he. Or was he there?

**SW:** He wasn't there when I was there. No, no. But Anna Goldowski was.

**MEH:** Natasha.

**SW:** Natasha. She was teaching science.

**MEH:** What was she like?

**SW:** She was terrific. I didn't know her that well, but I knew her a bit.

**MEH:** Throughout the college's history there was a strong European presence there, through the refugees. What do you think the impact on the community was of that large refugee presence?

**SW:** I think – you know, it's so funny. If you go to formally think about it, we were kind of a crazy mix of people.

**MEH:** Definitely.

**SW:** But it didn't feel like that when you were there. It was like everybody was who they were, and we were all just kind of discovering ourselves and one another. Of course, there were factions and frictions all the time. I mean, that was always in the school from the moment it began. But it wasn't based on those kind of things. I don't think so. There was a German student who came – Uli Rufer or something like that. He came and he was sponsored by the Dreiers. That was a very difficult experience for us because we were not wanting to be prejudiced about a young German person, but he had been in Hitler youth and all. Here were all these people who had fled Germany there. We were trying to give him the benefit of the doubt that he was his own person, and he had chosen to come to America. So, he couldn't be that hostile to us. Yet, a lot of funny stuff happened from him.

**MEH:** Like –

**SW:** He kind of created these factions that ended up with a lot of trouble at the school. I don't know. I was a little bit unaware of what was happening. But he did make trouble between different parts of the school. He turned on different people, including the Dreiers, I think, who had sponsored him. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

**MEH:** What did you do on the work program?

**SW:** A number of things. At one point – of course, I worked on the farm. I was quite distressed because when we were taking care of all of this wonderful corn and I was visualizing having lovely corn on the cob. Then after I had done a lot of work on the farm, I realized it was for the pigs. So, I was unhappy about that,

but that's just kidding. I was really happy working on the farm, but also I at one point was making the butter for the school. That was a very difficult experience because your hands were in this ice and butter and you just feel frozen.

[LAUGHTER] But anyway it was fun and interesting. I was on the garbage crew. People were very jealous because we went by truck to the dump and we'd bring all the garbage. We'd go all around the school collecting trash – it was really trash, not food garbage – collect all the trash. Then we'd go to the dump. We'd come back with just as much as we brought because everybody was making things and finding things. People would beg us to go on the garbage run with us, to the dump with us. They were very jealous. That was Francesca Wronowska in her truck and her dog and Bob and myself and sometimes visiting people could beg their way on the ride to the dump. That was very exciting.

**MEH:** So, you would get things for art classes.

**SW:** Oh, yes.

**MEH:** Did you have a study?

**SW:** I had a study. It was very interesting. When I went back for the reunion, my husband and I – we slept in the room that had been my study, and that was completely by chance. It took me a little moment to realize that had been my study. It was very sweet. We were very cold and uncomfortable.

**MEH:** I was very cold in another room. What do you think was the effect of x of having your own study?

**SW:** Oh, it was just wonderful. It really was to have a place to kind of sift through what you had learned and draw and make things on your own and then also to

work out the work for the school. But just a place that you could go to. I mean, many people in the dorms were in a room with many, many people. When I first went to Black Mountain, I was in a big dorm with so many people, and it was very, very difficult. It was like being in the hospital or something. You just had a little tiny something and a bed. There were about six of us in a room. It was really difficult. At that time the study was all more important because you could finally have your own things and your own place and invite people in and have a real dialogue about what you were doing. It was just real important that you had something to call your own. Then when I persuaded Delores to let me share space with her, that was marvelous because it was just two of us.

**MEH:** Did your study face on the lake or did it face –

**SW:** It faced the lake. Yeah. It was wonderful. Bob took weaving so I would help him set up the loom and so on. That was interesting. It was really nice to get to know Anni Albers a bit. Such a wonderful –

**MEH:** What was she like?

**SW:** I found her very warm. I know a lot of people don't have that reaction to her. It was funny because Albers was always Mr. Albers, and she was always Anni. I mean, she was much more open to a dialogue than he was. I found her very pleasant. I liked her a lot.

**MEH:** You didn't take weaving?

**SW:** I didn't take weaving, but I'd get down there and help set up the looms.

**MEH:** You went to the Baptist church with Delores, went into town with her? Did you ever go into the mountains? Did you go into area beyond the college?

**SW:** A little bit. People used to take these hikes. I'm not physically able to do that so much. I climbed one of the mountains, a little one. I was very proud of myself. It was such a beautiful part of the world. It is such a beautiful part of the world. Such an amazing experience to be there. I grew up in the country myself. My parents had a little island we spent summers on in Connecticut. I love being outdoors and I love the country, but I spent winters mostly in New York. So the luxury of this environment. It was just so beautiful and wonderful I couldn't believe it.

**MEH:** Your family was a creative family.

**SW:** Very, very.

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

**SW:** He was a writer and my mother, before she married, she wrote poetry a great deal and drew and painted and was very creative in her life afterwards, but not formally thinking of herself professionally as a writer or painter. But she did all those things. My father was always reading to us. I later worked a great deal with images to words and working with "livres d'artistes" limited edition books. When I was a child, my father read to us everything including Finnegan's Wake and Chaucer and the Illiad and the Odyssey. I remember him reading these things to us while we did the dishes. So, I grew up – He also took me to museums he appreciated painting and had artists friends. So, I started at a very great advantage. Most of the people that I knew in all of my art education were at odds with their family about what they did. Or at least their family didn't understand them at all. So, I was very lucky in that way. I really was. My father

really had me very early on learning about writing and painting. Of course, many of the people I was in school with were there on the GI Bill. That was the only way they were able to become artists or writers or poets or whatever because they didn't require their family's backing in it and they could support developing this need and being able to go to school by having the GI Bill. It changed the art world a great deal actually to have so many people able to study painting. Before that, it had been a very middle class and upper class activity. But the GI Bill changed that and a lot of people actually went to art school who never could have otherwise.

**MEH:** Actually, at that time the GI Bill changed all of that but there weren't many general schools where art was taught.

**SW:** No.

**MEH:** Your parents were exceptional in that they were willing to send you to this unaccredited school. It [the GI Bill] made it possible for these people whose parents, even if they had the money, never would have sent them to select Black Mountain.

**SW:** Yes. That's true. Yes, I picked the right parents.

**MEH:** And the right school.

**SW:** And the right school.

**MEH:** How did you get back and forth to Black Mountain generally? Did you take the train?

**SW:** The first time I went, I took the train. Then at some point, I shared a second-hand station wagon with the old wooden sides. We used that breaking down all the way to get from North Carolina to New York.

**MEH:** Were you doing the blueprints when you were at Black Mountain or was that totally after?

**SW:** It was after the first time I went to Black Mountain and before the second.

**MEH:** You arrived at the regular entrance time in the fall of '48. So the people who were there that summer – de Kooning and Fuller and all of those people would have left by that time. That's really a question.

**SW:** Yes.

**MEH:** Then you didn't stay for the summer session.

**SW:** No, no. At that point, we began making the blueprints. Shortly after that I married Bob, and we developed the blueprints together. That was collaborative. Actually, it's curious about that because my father's mother – grandmother on my father's side – her father was Dankmar Adler of Adler & Sullivan Architects in Chicago. When my grandmother was a little girl, she took a glass negative of a picture of herself to her father's office and on her father's blueprint paper made a blueprint image of herself which I have. When I was a child, we made blueprints of leaves and flowers and so on. That was not unusual. But when Bob and I thought about developing these full scale blueprints, that had not been done. The blueprint had been used or cyano types had been used for a very long time in relation to photography, photographic plates, like the direct images of leaves and flowers and so on. I guess we were the first people to use it in



that way. Our first victim was my little brother who was at the time about five – four or five. He fit on the piece of paper we thought we'd try it out on. So, he was the first. Then we went on from there and together in New York when we continued with this, our blueprints were shown at the Museum of Modern Art in this early exhibition about unusual photography. Then they were in Bonwit Teller's windows and so on. Then Life magazine printed them. So, that was something Bob and I developed together.

**MEH:** It's really remarkable that as young as you were and just starting out that this garnered that much attention.

**SW:** Yes, yes.

**MEH:** It was really a dramatic image. Go ahead. I interrupted you.

**SW:** No, that's fine.

**MEH:** Did you develop these by exposing them to light?

**SW:** First, I would take the blueprint paper – unexposed blueprint paper – and put objects on it or people or whatever and expose them to either direct sunlight or sunlamps. We used to use sunlamps in New York. Now they don't make those anymore because they discovered they were dangerous. Then you developed them either with – hydrogen peroxide, but we used potassium bichromate which was the chemical we could use to develop them. Then you have to wash them again to clear them of all the chemicals. They just dry flat.

**MEH:** Did you have a studio then or was this all happening in your apartment?

**SW:** Well, we began on my parents's island outdoors.

**MEH:** That was the summer when you left.

**SW:** Then when we moved to New York, we had a little apartment on 95<sup>th</sup> Street on the west side – that was just bedroom-studio, everything, you know. It was just one room for everything. We just made the blueprints there and our paintings.

**MEH:** You were going to the Art Students League at that time.

**SW:** Yes, we went to the Art Students League. Bob was still getting the GI Bill. That's what we lived on, this tinsy little bit of money. We both went to the Art Students League.

**MEH:** So, you went from Black Mountain to the island for the summer and then to the Art Students League. Were there other Black Mountain people around during that interim period?

**SW:** Yes, I mean, it's interesting. Every time there'd be a Merce Cunningham concert or a Cage concert, you'd find all your old buddies from Black Mountain. I mean, they'd assemble like a club for these different events or poetry readings or so on. I mean, just everything lively that was happening at New York, you'd find your friends from Black Mountain. It was really nice.

**MEH:** Cage and Cunningham, you must have met in New York.

**SW:** I met them at Black Mountain.

**MEH:** You met them at Black Mountain. I'm going to go through a chronology, and then we'll come back to some other things. You went to the Art Students League. That would have been a couple of years before you went back to Black Mountain.

**SW:** I went back to Black Mountain the summer of '51.

**MEH:** With your son, your infant son.

**SW:** Right. Right.

**MEH:** Did you study that summer or were you a mother-in-residence?

**SW:** No, no. I was mother-in-residence. I mean, I would go and look at things and listen to things and so on. Actually, it was a very difficult summer for me. I'd sometimes meet people who were there and say, "Oh, hi," and I don't recognize them because I was having such a hard time and all. That's a big blur. I can't tell you a lot about that summer. I was very aware of Aaron Siskind and –

**MEH:** Harry Callahan.

**SW:** Harry Callahan. Aaron actually took pictures of Christopher as an infant there and I have them. Of my son, Chris. He was there and he took these pictures of Chris. It's funny, he had a camera over this crib, outdoor crib. He was watching. Christopher, just a tiny newborn. He said, "Just leave me alone. I'm going to just take these pictures." I left and I came back and Chris was awake and crying and stuff. And Aaron was asleep. He had taken five or six really wonderful pictures of Chris which I'm very happy to have. But my marriage was kind of falling apart so that summer, as I say, is kind of a blur.

**MEH:** Before we go on, do you have any other particular memories of the summer?

One question I have is, it had been two years since the Alberses had left, and the Dreiers. Did you see any real change in the college, any real difference?

**SW:** Yes. But as I say, I wasn't so much a part of things. It still was a lively place and there were interesting things happening. But I wasn't so much a part of them because I was just sort of on the side and having troubles. It did feel somewhat

different but I'm not too clear about it. At that point, we had one of those spaces that had been put up – what did you call them after the war –

**MEH:** GI Bill houses.

**SW:** We had one of those places, and I was just there that summer – as I say, it's pretty much of a blur.

**MEH:** Was that the summer that Motherwell and Shahn were there? Do you have any particular memories of them?

**SW:** Yes, Ben Shahn's daughter Judith used to babysit for Christopher. I was aware of them, and I talked to them and so on, but as I say – Motherwell I knew a little bit after I left. Shahn always seemed to me a surprising choice for a visiting artist. But he was a very nice man and a very generous, sweet man.

**MEH:** Before we go on to other things, the tape's out – [IRRELEVANT TECHNICAL COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

**[END OF AUDIOTAPE/VIDEOTAPE 1, BEGINNING OF TAPE 2]**

**SW:** The exhibition that I had in Asheville. I can pull that out and show it to you.

**MEH:** Also, do you have photographs from Black Mountain? They probably would be at home, not here.

**SW:** They would not be here.

**MEH:** I did have photographs that were in the book. I'm always looking for photographs.

**SW:** Yeah. Do you have the photographs of Bob's that he made at Black Mountain, the Quiet House? He has some very beautiful.

**MEH:** I should really try to see those. When I started my research, they were not as available. I've seen them in various places, but not the total run of them.

**SW:** My publisher I work with, Vincent FitzGerald, he had a concept of doing a book of Bob's Black Mountain photographs, done photogravure with one of the Black Mountain poets. It would be a very beautiful book. I think he would do it if he could get some cooperation.

**MEH:** It would be a beautiful a collaboration.

**SW:** Yes, it would.

**MEH:** There's that early piece that they did when he did the illustration and Joel Oppenheimer did the poem. It's in celebration of the Katy Litz birthday. It's an early Jonathan Williams publication.

**SW:** That was Bob's images.

**MEH:** Actually, I see we may bounce back and forth between Black Mountain and later things now. An important part actually of what was happening at Black Mountain after you left was collaborations between artists and writers. There's been no influence there, but this has been an important part of your creative work.

**SW:** Oh, absolutely.

**MEH:** Can you tell me how this got started and what you're doing?

**SW:** In terms of the books. I've actually always written myself and always loved reading and writing. I was working on some prints at the printmaking workshop for my gallery in Sweden. They were publishing a suite of images called Handbook, etchings. That was a sort of a book, but it was without words. At the same time, my publisher Vincent FitzGerald was working there on one of his

books. We met each other and we'd have lunches. Everybody in the workshop would sit down at lunch together and have talks about what we were doing, watch what each other was doing. He plainly was impressed with my work, and I was interested in what he was doing. I was working with an etcher named Marjorie Van Dyck. She was a Joyce freak and I was a Joyce freak. He said to us one day, "If you could do images to words, what writer would you pick?" and we both said Joyce. So, immediately we began on this project which was our first book, The Epiphanies. We work very beautifully together, and he is the greatest person to work with. I mean, he just eggs you on to go way further than you might of thought of by yourself. He's just the most wonderful person to collaborate with. He feels that way to, so we've done ten books together. It's been a very big part of my life and very satisfying to me.

**MEH:** Are you working on a new one now? You've just had this major –

**SW:** Just finished the Gertrude Stein Tender Buttons. In between when we're not doing a book, we're often doing prints and sometimes prints related to the books. Sometimes regular prints.

**MEH:** I'm not familiar with the whole series, but have you worked with living writers?

**SW:** Yes – not so much – but I worked with The Warrior Ant, Lee Breuer. Another poem of Lee Breuer's which was "After Sophocles Writing." Those were two I did with Vincent with Lee Breuer. It would be nice to do more.

**MEH:** Going back to the fifties, after you and Bob split, you were living and working in the city.

**SW:** Yes.

**MEH:** With a small son.

**SW:** Right.

**MEH:** You've always been an artist, always pursued your work as an artist.

**SW:** Absolutely, absolutely.

**MEH:** Were there Black Mountain people that you were working with or close to at that point in your life?

**SW:** Well, there were people that I saw very regularly. Ray Johnson used to come and visit us a lot. He'd pile into our house, and he kind of enjoyed the fact that I had this little kid. We kept track of each other's work.

**MEH:** When you say "our house," at that point "our house" was –

**SW:** Chris' and mine. [LAUGHTER]

**MEH:** What way Ray like?

**SW:** Very enigmatic. Very, very strange. Always strange. I mean, at Black Mountain – he was there when I was there – at Black Mountain he was that way. I mean, he was a hidden person in many ways. It always felt like he needed to find a way to be as obscure as possible. I mean, he spent a lifetime – like the major effort was that you shouldn't know who he really was. That's what he was like. He was very inventive in his work about finding these kind of metaphors for this secrecy of his. He was strange, but sweet. He was very sweet. When you say that about him, it doesn't sound sweet, but he was sweet – and warm. He was a warm person. Then when I knew him a little bit later – because you didn't know him too well after because he was so reclusive – when I'd meet him or talk to him – he'd phone once in a while – I'd talk to him – it was always like a game, that he

shouldn't expose anything about himself and that he should always be as unreal as possible. A very strange person, but I did like him a lot.

**MEH:** He was in Albers classes then when you were there.

**SW:** Yes, he was. I mean, gradually you think about the people who were there. Like, Nick Cernovich I ran into later – I mean only in recent years because he wasn't living in the same part of the country, but at Black Mountain, we were very good buddies. So, it was nice to re-meet him.

**MEH:** What do you remember about Ruth Asawa?

**SW:** Oh, I liked Ruth so well. She just seemed to me a person with such a sense of herself and such amazing ability and direction and everything. She seemed so absolutely comfortable with herself and so directed. You knew what she was going to do and who she was. But she had this one vulnerability and that was that, because of having been in the horrific Japanese camps during the war, she was defensive about being Japanese for people she didn't know. If she knew you, she was proud of it. If she didn't know you, she would sort of indicate that she was Chinese. I thought that was so sad. I have another artist friend who was in the camps as a young person, and it's such an embarrassment that we did such a thing. That was her only vulnerability, I think. Other than that, she seemed very secure of herself. A very fine person.

**MEH:** You mentioned Ruth and Delores. Are there other students you remember particularly, or faculty for that matter?



**SW:** Well, I'm trying to think. I think I've mentioned most of the people I was very close to. At Black Mountain you knew everybody, and they were all part of your life. I'm trying to think – Inga –

**MEH:** Inga Svarc?

**SW:** Yes.

**MEH:** It was. She was German.

**SW:** Yes. She's a writer.

**MEH:** A very fine novelist now.

**SW:** It was fun to see her at the reunion. And her tall friend. What was her name? I knew them rather well. But it's funny, if you don't see people – I mean, the people centered around New York, you kept track of a bit. There are others. I'm sure I'll think of it all the minute we stop talking. It's funny about Oli Sihvonen. I didn't know him at Black Mountain after. But I knew his sisters – both of his sisters – Mim and Eine. I'm trying to think. Peter Jen –

**MEH:** Jennerjahn.

**SW:** Peter Jennerjahn I know. It was really fun to see him. But Peter –

**MEH:** Peter Heineman.

**SW:** Heineman. He was there when I was there. It was funny about him because he seemed very kind of reactive. He didn't seem – he seemed a different sort of person. Then over the years he was doing portraiture and so on. Then recently a week or so ago I got an announcement from him with a very abstract piece. It was as if he was hooking up again with his connection to his Albers year. There were a lot of people whose images float in my mind, but I can't think – I knew

Joan Stack but I don't think – Yes, she was there when I was first there. Yes. I'm sure she was in the classes. No, it was an amazing community. It really was.

**MEH:** What do you think - what do you think the real impact of having been there has been on your work has it has developed, the totality?

**SW:** I think it's enormous. I think this business of collaboration – a lot comes out of that sense of community and the dialogue with people who are working in different ways. I think that the fact that Bob Rauschenberg and I are both very comfortable with collaboration, work very well with other people, comes from those times. I mean, it doesn't entirely, but I think that influenced that kind of comfort with that concept. So, it's curious. You have to ask me something else. I went blank.

**MEH:** You were very young when you went there. There were the G.I.s who were in their twenties, and you were the kid just out of high school. Were you comfortable in living with this Bohemian community at that age?

**SW:** Oh, absolutely. It was even familiar to me because of my parents and their friends and so on. No, I felt very at home with that.

**MEH:** What were you like at that age?

**SW:** Well, I don't know. It's hard to know. I think that a lot of who I am now, I was then except that I was more kidlike. I had been through a lot because I had been in the fire and lost my brother and all this. My parents had been through a great deal.

**MEH:** How old were you at that time?

**SW:** I was eleven when I was burned, and my brother had just turned thirteen when he died. My parents the following year adopted my sister and then adopted another brother. One when I was twelve, one when I was fourteen. I had a lot of responsibilities for these children, for these babies. It was really wonderful for me because I was going through a lot of series of operations, going through a very great deal of tough stuff physically. I'd been through a lot with the fire and the loss of my brother. So, then I'm thrust into junior high school and then high school experience where everybody's into social things that I couldn't easily be a part of. So, it was wonderful for me to have these responsibilities. My parents were terrific about not babying me or coddling me for my being injured. I didn't learn to walk until my sister was learning to walk. I went through a great deal. So, to be expected to perform as a member of the family and to do my part and so on and so forth so I had a certain maturity in that sense even though I was very young.

**MEH:** You were really still in recovery when you went to Black Mountain.

**SW:** Yes.

**MEH:** But there you weren't coddled either. [LAUGHTER]

**SW:** No. Never was. I haven't had that pleasure.

**MEH:** There was an acceptance of people who were dealing with problems, whether it was Hazel in a wheelchair or – Which you might not have found as much at Bennington or one of the ivy league schools. It would have been like an extension of Dalton.

**SW:** That's true. No, I'm grateful for that, both for my family and for the school, that I wasn't permitted to think of myself as poor little Susan.

**MEH:** That's remarkable.

**SW:** Oh, yes.

**MEH:** When were you and Bernie married?

**SW:** I met Bernie when Christopher was about six, and we were married, I guess, when he was seven. It was interesting because Christopher had had my full attention from the time he was born because Bob and I were separated when he was months old. So, when we talked about getting married, I said to Bernie that we wouldn't get married unless it was alright with Christopher because it was going to be changing his life. So, Bernie and I asked Christopher for permission to marry. I asked him what he thought of it. "Chris, this is sort of like a choice you're making too in your life. It's like we're both marrying Bernie. If you don't feel for it, we won't do it." And I meant it. It was the greatest thing because he said that he'd think about it. The next day he said that he thought it was a good idea. He and Bernie always liked each other so well. I think that in any growing up thing you go through kind of a lot of tussles and stuff. I think the fact that Christopher had his opinion about this made it very good for him to always kind of not feel taken advantage of. But he happens to be the most amazing person. Completely nonjudgmental and kind. A wonderful man. He really is. Bernie and I have a daughter, too.

**MEH:** I was going to say. Do you have one or two kids?

**SW:** I have two, my daughter Sara. Chris is a photographer, a wonderful photographer. My daughter is a painter and writer. We don't know how to do anything different. When Chris was graduating from high school, he was interested in math and physics. I thought, "How will I ever have a dialogue with a son of mine if he is going to be in these fields?" So, he had to get away from home to his school to have some time to himself to kind of come to his artist self. Even though he was photographing and printing his own pictures and making books of photographs when he was six, even so professionally he thought he'd go into physics. But with three artist parents you have to get a little distance before you can make that commitment. So, he did.

**MEH:** What do you think the importance of Black Mountain was as a school? This is sort of a big question, so you can just fumble around.

**SW:** Yes, I will have to fumble around.

**MEH:** Be comfortable with that.

**SW:** I think the importance of that is not only for the people who went there and experienced this, but to change the possibilities for how you can be an individual in the world in these different areas – in music and painting and writing and everything. Because it just changes the concept of education, I think, and influenced a lot of schools that had been much more formal. I had never put these thoughts into words, so I don't know quite how to do it. The fact that the world took notice of Black Mountain, too, made big changes in general in education. Certainly, what happened at Black Mountain and the dialogue there between both the students – the relationship of students to teachers was very

different than it ever was anywhere else and so on. Those dialogues became something that changed our creative world. I mean, naturally I'm so aware of the visual arts, but when you think of what happened in writing. When you think of so many things. When you think of Hamada being there teaching pottery. That's just amazing. Also, it became part of the world more. I mean, America was always so isolated. Bringing these European minds and what had happened at the Bauhaus – this wonder of it – that was suddenly so closed down and cut off and disappeared in Germany. Then to have it have another life. My husband Bernie Kirschenbaum went to the Institute of Design which was another Bauhaus school. So, we have that dialogue, too. It's hard to say, but I think it was just an amazing liveliness that sometimes happens that just changes everything. It's like when Picasso and Braque had a dialogue that ended up with Cubism suddenly. There's a certain coming together of people that nothing's ever the same after.

**MEH:** I think with respect to that that one thing that made the dialogue at Black Mountain so significant is that things were not compartmentalized, that ideas really could flow freely. You didn't have people not talking, "I'm not talking to that person because she's a dancer and I'm an artist and we're in different departments."

**SW:** No, that's what I meant when I said that what happened in the dining room after class was as important as anything. The fact that the students and faculty were all a part of each other's lives and this dialogue with everybody. As I said, just

the fact that the dietician was taking Albers class. You had this. You had this. It was a community including everybody and that was very special.

**MEH:** Do you have any particular memories of the cooks, Malrey and Cornelia?

**SW:** I remember them and I remember working in the kitchen. They were very special. I don't know what to tell you about it, but it was special. Yes. It was so funny going back to the reunion because these things that are kind of blurry and foggy, you are suddenly putting together in your head. One thing I felt at the reunion was you have this little dread when you go back, that if you go back fifty years later, you think here I was this kid and this was a part of my life. Then suddenly I'm going to meet these people and they're going to be grandmothers and everything like me. It's a little scary, a little unnerving. But it wasn't that way because everybody's lives had been vibrant, and everybody had continued along the path that they had begun there. It was great to know them later in their lives. It wasn't like that feeling you have of "uh oh." It was grand. When you think of Betty Jennerjahn and when you think of her, she was our dance teacher. She was beautiful and we were dancing. She moved so wonderfully. Then you come back, and she is so excited because of painting. She's showing her slides of her painting. When she didn't feel comfortable dancing any more, there was this whole other world. That's Black Mountain. That's Black Mountain.

**MEH:** There is no doubt that people who went to Black Mountain were self-selecting. People who went to Black Mountain were looking for something different. Still, I think Black Mountain somehow met that need and kindled something in them and kept it alive that is really remarkable.

**SW:** Then for people who had a need to do some creative thing but didn't have the affirmation.

**MEH:** You were really the exception there – with your family.

**SW:** Because so many people I knew just had this feeling that music was important to them or writing was important to them. But they hadn't had any backup or affirmation, and they found it there. They found a dialogue about the thing that meant something to them. That's interesting actually on a whole other issue – that's interesting about the computer age, is that people can find each other. My husband was a partner of Buckminster Fuller. He's a sculptor now. He was an architect and a sculptor. He's an odd thinker. Because of the computer, he can find like-minded people. He belongs to this Art and Mathematics group, and he belongs to a group called the Symmetry Group. He finds these other nut cases like him, you know, and the computer's made that happen. That was the kind of dialogue you had then, that there wasn't any other way to have it. To kind of excite one another. When I talk about Picasso and Braque, it's the same kind of thing. Like somebody's hearing you. You're inspiring each other and things happen. That's the spirit of Black Mountain.

**MEH:** A good place to stop. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

**SW:** [REFERRING TO DELORES FULLMAN] So brilliant. Musically, so sophisticated. I mean, she had studied every area of music. Just one of these voices that just makes you faint it's so beautiful. When she went back to Chicago, my grandmother arranged that she got a Rosenwald Grant. I think she came to Black Mountain on a Rosenwald grant. My grandmother was trying to



help her some. Then Delores had this child. She had the child by herself, and back then in 1950, '51, that kind of really shocked my grandmother and she sort of left – Delores, after that she kind of just lost steam in her profession. I felt really bad about it because she had had this great training and this belief in her future in music. But we always used to find each other in Chicago when I'd go.

**MEH:** Did she ever – she didn't ever marry did she?

**SW:** She and her daughter Trude, they came to visit us when Trude was maybe two and Christopher was one-and-a-half or something. They came and stayed with us, and these two little kids together – I have some photographs of them together and they were so cute. Delores always said that Trude was the best thing that ever happened to her. I wonder what ever happened to Trude.

**MEH:** She may be the link –

**SW:** That will find her. Delores had a lot of brothers and sisters so maybe somebody will find her.

**MEH:** Are there things that we haven't talked about that you think are important about Black Mountain?

**SW:** I don't know. I haven't talked very much about my art life since. That I haven't done.

**MEH:** Part of my hesitancy there because I'm not that familiar totally with the scope of your art life since.

**SW:** Right.

**MEH:** It's hard for me to ask questions about particulars.

**SW:** Well, I think the thing – I guess the thing that’s important to me is that it’s been a very intensive part of my life and now the book work, too. But that’s my self-image in terms of my work. I mean, you saw the book that I made for the Black Mountain show. It shows some of the things that have happened for my work. But it’s been interesting that in recent years I’ve had much more attention in Europe than in the States. I hope to change that again.

**MEH:** Why do you think that is?

**SW:** I think maybe – I used to show very regularly in New York. My work was picked up by Anders Tornberg in Sweden. He had a great belief in it and put a lot of energy into it and made me shows elsewhere in Europe and then other dealers picked up my work there. It’s just that I don’t have the support system to kind of do both. I was working very hard towards shows there and towards projects there. I mean, if I’d kept a focus that it’s important for me to make the connections here, maybe I would have done better about it. Actually, Anders Tornberg died two years ago, and I thought to myself, well, now it’s time for me to reconnect in this country. I mean, I have had plenty of shows here, museum shows and so on, but I haven’t had a regular gallery that I work with at this moment. My publisher Vincent FitzGerald, he is an agent for my work in a sense and believes in my work. A lot of things happen through him.

**MEH:** In what galleries did you show work in your earlier years?

**SW:** Well, I showed at 112 Greene Street many, many years ago. I had three shows there. I showed with Frank Marino until he closed the gallery. I showed with Parsons-Dreyfus – Betty Parsons – one of her two galleries. Those were main

galleries. Then I had a lot of other exhibitions here and there – the Judith Christian Gallery, I showed there.

**MEH:** The work of yours that I'm familiar with – I have more material at home and if I'd reviewed it, that would have helped. If my memory is correct – have you ever worked in a purely abstract manner?

**SW:** Oh, absolutely.

**MEH:** The work that I know of the last fifteen years always has some reference to nature or the body form even though as you can see from these, it's handled in a very abstract manner.

**SW:** Well, I have – for instance, this piece over the door that you see there, it's made of three overlapping circles. I made a group of paintings about the moon. They were all these self folds. I've worked a lot with crumpled images and images with soft folds. So, yes, I call them paintings about the moon, but they're very pure abstraction. I have a lot of other things like that. But somehow, as now in my work, I usually alter an image in some way there to – like these new works, they're trading parts expressing time through movement. So, they're figures but they're all shattered and put together differently to express moving in time-space. For instance, between the windows, this chair image. It's painted on steel and it almost has a Cubist reference. It's a chair but it's tilted and bent. I always seem to have done that in my work to have moved it around somehow, always folding, crumpling, whatever.

**MEH:** Do you attribute this at all to your work with Albers?

**SW:** Well, not that in specific. But I even have a painting I call Joe for Albers because of the colors, the red and green. They're usually the pure abstractions that fold.

**MEH:** Why do you use the chair image? Does that have a particular significance to you?

**SW:** It's like a still-life. I'm comfortable in a chair. [LAUGHTER] It's a receptacle for a person. Having aches and pains and arthritis and not very good legs from the fire, a chair is very friendly to me, so I pick it as a subject. [LAUGHTER]

**MEH:** These images of the paintings that you have. These are the paintings that are going to go to Sweden this summer.

**SW:** This spring.

**MEH:** Tell me about that exhibition.

**SW:** Well, this exhibition is in Wanås Castle and Sculpture Park. It's a wonderful place. You walk through miles of woodland and keep coming upon sculptures. It's just amazing. Then they have a big old barn building. Each floor of it is a solo show. I have one of the floors. I think there are four floors. So, it's like fifty feet of beautiful, pure wall. So of these pieces, I'm going to have twenty-eight of these in that space. I'm going to have one room all color paintings, and one room all black and white. There they're figurative and cut up and parts traded. As I say, that stands for moving in time-space. So, it's like – I've often drawn from Muybridge because of its concept of moving through time. It's another way of doing that.

**MEH:** I also have a sense of a reflection. The reflection often is fragmented, such as a reflection in water.

**SW:** That's interesting you say that because three of these are swimmer images – that white one there, this one and the one behind me, the blue one – these are swimmers. I make actual figurative pieces, and then I cut them up and trade parts.

**MEH:** Traded parts. I love reflections because they're images of something real, but they're always layered and fragmented.

**SW:** Right.

**MEH:** Exist in a different realm of time and space.

**SW:** Right. So, should I show you those Black Mountain drawings. [BREAK IN TAPING] [VIDEOTAPE ONLY] This is a drawing from Black Mountain times. It's a model drawing, but I can see that Albers had us drawing on top of another drawing. He used to do that. He'd say, "You're just a student. It isn't anything to keep. It isn't anything to think about." And he'd have this drawing on top of our drawing. So, the pencil drawing there is of a stand, a sculpture stand, which we had to draw in pencil. Then on top of that the life drawing from the class.

**MEH:** I see there's no shading or modeling or anything like that.

**SW:** No, we were supposed to always draw with a pure line, but as little line as possible to express the form. That was what he taught us to do. That's another figure. It makes me think how when we'd draw, we'd put our drawings all down on the floor of the classroom. It was hard to find which one to pick up because we all had to draw the same way. [LAUGHTER] That's another model on the old cheap paper that's falling apart.

**MEH:** Did he give you a time limit on these?

**SW:** No, we didn't – we just drew. Each pose had a certain amount of time.

**MEH:** Did he ever draw in class?

**SW:** No.

**MEH:** You said this is a drawing of a –

**SW:** Of a child. He had to pose for us. I think we have to draw him faster because he was little and wiggly. I think that was the farmer's little son. That's a pencil line so it's very faint.

**MEH:** I was zooming in to get it very carefully.

**SW:** Well, I was making the swimmers which I cut up and I reassemble. I made four drawings of swimmers. They were so fun and funny.

**MEH:** It's beautiful.

**SW:** I kept them this way. I didn't cut these up. I broke my rule. But it was fun to draw them.

**MEH:** They are funny. They're great.

**SW:** They're funny. Don't cut these up. They're so beautiful just as they are. I have a couple of others that in the process of this thing where I make them into six parts and then trade them around, I decided to keep a few. I also photographed them before I cut them. I have a record of all of them before –

**MEH:** Before they were cut up. Do you ever hesitate before you start cutting?

**SW:** Well, when I do [LAUGHTER] –

**MEH:** Then you don't cut – [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING] [AUDIOTAPE RESUMES]

**MEH:** Sue, I have one other question I wanted to ask you. Did you ever get a degree?

**SW:** No, I didn't.

**MEH:** Did it make any difference?

**SW:** No, it's funny. I've taught. I even taught at Pratt. It's been just fine for me. I'm very thoroughly self-educated. It's been fine. I've had art school and Black Mountain and other stuff, but I never did get a degree.

**MEH:** Do you think in today's world that you could have a career in art without a degree?

**SW:** Well, I think it would be harder to do. I really do. My daughter just got her Master's. But, I don't know. It didn't seem like I needed to do that, so I didn't. But I've been always kind of doing a lot of studying on my own. I like doing it that way.  
[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

**MEH:** I've asked you what a lot of people were like at Black Mountain. What was Bob Rauschenberg like then?

**SW:** Well, he's the same Bob Rauschenberg that he is now, in the sense of he just had a million ideas and was intensively working all the time and was vibrant and lively and interested in everything. He's the same character, he once said. Now, he's more sophisticated than he was then, but he has the same character, absolutely. Very delightful, inventive. Everything lively.

**MEH:** I'm sure you must have visited his family.

**SW:** Absolutely.

**MEH:** You came from very different backgrounds.

**SW:** His father had no idea of what this strange person was who happened to be his son. I mean, he was sort of a man of few words. He liked his hunting and he liked his hunting dogs. He couldn't understand somebody who didn't want to go and work for somebody and get paid for it. His mother, she had certain creative

aspects to her. I don't think she had any idea much about art. For instance, she made shirts for Bob. She'd find odd and eccentric fabric and make him shirts with those. In a certain way she showed a visual sense, and she certainly – as she got older and Bob was having museum shows and so on, she certainly enjoyed his place in the world. But I think when he was a young man, it kind of frightened her. I'm certain.

**MEH:** What about your parents? As you entered the art world, were they comfortable with that?

**SW:** Oh, they were very supportive. Yes, absolutely. As I've expressed, they had many creative friends, so that wasn't so surprising.

**MEH:** Are there any questions I haven't asked that you think are important, aspects of Black Mountain, particular memories you have?

**SW:** I'm sure I'll think of them when –

**MEH:** After we've packed all this up.

**SW:** It was strange, first the reunion and then when I went back for my exhibition in Asheville. It was very strange because it did kind of tickle you about your memory and so on. For people who've had active lives, so much happens in the interim. If you only just went to school and then did quiet things, then you'd remember everything as very important. When you're painting and showing and traveling and raising kids, you have to kind of dig for it in your memory.

**MEH:** Did you have – one other thing that people remember – did you have any encounters with snakes at Black Mountain?



**SW:** Oh, I think so. I think so. But that doesn't frighten me. No, the dome house I told you about that my husband designed and built. It's in the woods and we see snakes. Snakes don't bother me. They're ok.

**[END OF INTERVIEW. END OF TRANSCRIPT]**