

Interviewee: LISA JALOWETZ ARONSON  
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

**MEH:** [GIVES IDENTIFICATION] Would you like to pronounce your name as you pronounce it.

**LA:** Lisa – with a soft S – Jalowetz Aronson.

**MEH:** You still say Jalovetz, properly.

**LA:** Well, I say Jalowetz, but I don't use it. I only used it while I was working.

**MEH:** But when you pronounce it, you pronounce it with the W as a V: Jalovetz?

**LA:** It's like a soft – like a wetz, Jalowetz. Not V. It never was a V.

**MEH:** That's what I thought. You say "Leeza." I've always mispronounced your name.

**LA:** That's okay, everyone does. (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** That's why I asked you to pronounce it yourself. We are in Nyack, New York on a beautiful cold day. This is Mary Emma Harris interviewing. Lisa, you came to Black Mountain in 1939?

**LA:** Yes.

**MEH:** How did you get there?

**LA:** I came really straight from Europe. I was a refugee since 1933, going from one country to another and landed eventually in Holland where my sister lived. My parents already were in this country. Father got this engagement at Black

Mountain College as a music teacher. While I was in Europe, all my original papers which were Czech ran out and I had a temporary visa in Holland. By the time I could emigrate, all my papers had run out. It was almost impossible to get here. But being I was enrolled at Black Mountain as a student, through my father's job, I was able to get on a preference list. At that time, of course, there were a tremendous amount of refugees trying to get out. So, I arrived almost a year later than my parents and with very little English. I had always concentrated on French and really practically started learning on the boat coming over. So, as far as language was concerned, it made it still difficult for me. But as far as impressions, it was absolutely wonders – a totally new world from the moment I arrived in New York, where we stayed until September when the school started. At first I thought it a fabulous, magic city, full of life and new impressions. Then we came to North Carolina and this exquisite landscape, the kind I had never seen, and came to the college, which was totally new for me. I had had a European education which was formal and strict, except I had gone to art school. But in terms of a learning institute, I just went through what is the equivalent, I guess, of high school. [TELEPHONE RINGS - INTERRUPTION].

**MEH:** You were talking about coming from New York into the Black Mountain landscape.

**LA:** Yes. It was so overwhelming, all the first impressions, like a strange world. Here I came into a place where students and faculty were dressed in jeans, and this incredible building on a mountaintop with a marvelous view. I'm totally visually oriented, so my impressions were totally visual at first. Then meeting some of

the faculty and some of the students. I couldn't imagine this being a school, and yet they were so welcoming and so open and friendly. I was always considered throughout my Black Mountain years as very shy. Now I'm not an ebullient person in terms of the way I behave on my expressions, but at that time it was strictly because I was awed by everything. It was so much to take in all at once and the language, which really still gave me difficulties. I immediately took classes with Albers. Since I'd had training in Europe and already a degree in stage design, I also took, of course, theater courses, which were mostly with Wunsch at the time. I stayed at Black Mountain for a year – a year-and-a-half, I guess, not quite two years – and really got more and more into it and learned a heck of a lot from the Albers classes. I enjoyed this kind of living immensely because it was close to the kind of Bohemian life I had lived in Vienna when I was last on my own. The theater work was not quite as interesting, but I worked on scenery with George Randall and certain designs on some shows, and I even acted in a show, when I could hardly open my mouth and didn't know what I was saying (LAUGHS). But it was glorious. The student life was always wonderful, and one made wonderful friends in a way lifelong friends.

**MEH:** Let's go back a little bit then. How did you come – physically get from Europe to the United States?

**LA:** Well, I came by boat. It was the Volendam. It was the sister ship of the Veendam from Rotterdam where they left. I lived in Scheveninsep – the last place. I had so-called foster parents. Not far from my sister, who was at that time in Wassenaar and then got married and lived in Amsterdam.

**MEH:** Now did she get married after you had left?

**LA:** No, I was there and I was at her wedding. Actually, not supposed to be there, but I was there, in a very funny way. But my parents saw me in Holland before they left for the U.S.A., and we always thought, "Well, I'll get there safely later on." That was all before Hitler went beyond Germany – although he had already gotten to Sudetenland CSR where actually Father's last position was. I came over to the U.S.A. when the German-Russian pact was made, and soon the invasion of Poland started by the Germans, and then everybody knew he is much more of a danger than we thought.

**MEH:** But 1939 is still very late.

**LA:** It was late. Indeed it was late.

**MEH:** What kind of visa did you have?

**LA:** Well, because I was enrolled as a student, I still get an extension of the visa until the moment I left. Because I was enrolled as a student, it was really with the help from Black Mountain College in addition to which I got an affidavit from [Mark] Brunswick, who gave affidavits to musicians of the Viennese School, many of them. He also gave affidavits to my father.

**MEH:** So you would have been able to come because, partially because, you were enrolled as a student at Black Mountain.

**LA:** Absolutely. I would have been stuck there. I had no other way because my papers literally ran out. So, I'm eternally grateful for that. That was only on account because Father was already engaged there, and they heard the plight of his and their younger child. Of course, my parents were fantastic. We lived

together – the students at Black Mountain lived separately. We were in Blue Ridge. It was part of the major building, Lee Hall. My parents had a little cottage, separate cottage. So there was a separation because I had already experienced independence and wanted to be on my own. My mother, who was a marvelous woman – but she was concerned about me and wanted to still run my life a little bit (LAUGHS) –

**MEH:** But you were only eighteen or nineteen then.

**LA:** Yeah, I was.

**MEH:** But you felt very independent then.

**LA:** Totally, because I had lived in Vienna totally independent when I went to art school there, while my parents were in Czechoslovakia. But I'd experienced several emigrations before that, you know – '33 in Germany, and then Anschluss Vienna '35, and then Czechoslovakia, and then I went to Amsterdam, and just in time to get out. I adapted very quickly to this new world and felt in seventh heaven not to be over there with my German language, which became more and more of a burden – it was my mother tongue. All the countries I went to later were not German-speaking countries. To have Albers as a teacher was unique, although I was always interested in stage design, essentially. Eventually I was told New York is the only place to go if you want to do stage design and that was my aim. So, I knew I would never finish Black Mountain really. But I got so much out of Werklehre and color theory, which I could apply even to theater design because – well, it's about illusion, in many ways and what different things can do to each other and what textures can do

against each other. So this was very useful in the theater. But the American theater at that time was nowhere near as advanced as the European theater. I really didn't know too much about the American theater and how they worked on their designs and so forth. Although, as I said, Wunsch was a wonderful person, I felt I didn't really get enough out of him. So, it was only Albers' class and whatever was connected with, and the students who were there, which were what I liked mostly. This whole way of life, and then participating and starting the new college at Lake Eden. It was so stimulating from morning 'til night. It was endless. Albers, of course –

**MEH:** [OFFMIKE INTERRUPTION]. Go ahead

**LA:** What was best about Black Mountain – [INTERRUPTION AGAIN]

**MEH:** I'm going to be asking you lots of questions. [TECHNICAL COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]. Now we were talking about –

**LA:** Black Mountain. I just wanted to say that the amazing thing at Black Mountain is that it was constantly challenging you, not only in the work for the classes but in terms of living together, which was also not so easy. They were all very strong individuals who lived there. So, that after a while certain groups developed and some quite, somewhat elitist and some were political, socially interested. Really a whole world, as I say. The one thing that Albers challenged us with was a certain awareness not only in what we have in front of us but what we see, what we receive, and what we retain. We had always interesting challenges. Or simple things like we would pass all these road signs, there was this typical Coca Cola sign we passed every day, once or twice a day. So, he

would say to us we should draw the Coca Cola graphic the way they are written, and it wasn't easy. Here we saw it every minute.

**MEH:** He had you do it from memory.

**LA:** From memory, yes. Or things like a spoon. Drawing a spoon, a small spoon, a large spoon, the size of it. You're handling it every day. Can you draw the actual size of the spoon? Looking at a person, doing a portrait of a person, can you see the one side is slightly – quite different from the other? Then these wonderful ideas of drawing where you drew really as little as possible and still get sort of, say, the essence. He was always out for the essence of something. That appealed to me tremendously. Also Werklehre. None of us had means. You'd go into the woods and pick up things, so you'd quickly brew up some strange concoctions. Then we put them on the floor, and he talked and discussed. That was also a wonderful way of a class, that every work was discussed, except for theory, color theory. Even that, when we came up with samples. He had a wonderful sense of humor, in a way, sort of a peasant like sense of humor. So, it was marvelous. It was really heaven on earth for me. Then Christmas, during vacation, we would all crave to go to New York, especially those who were interested in theater. You always looked for the few students who happened to have a car (LAUGHS), and early on tried to hitch a ride. If that didn't work, naturally you had to take the bus because the train was too expensive. So, it took forever to get to that city at that time (LAUGHS). But it was another Mecca, sort of, that drew us. For me, particularly, because I really wanted already to learn something about the American theater because I

had already worked with stage design in Europe. I had introductions to a couple of people in the city. They said, "Well, if you want to work in theater, first you have to join a union, and you have to live in the city. There's no other theater." Then I started naturally aiming for the city, because I really had had schooling, and I was not a kind of academic student, who needed to have a degree or something. I just saw Black Mountain as a fabulous experience, and knowing that my parents were there, I knew I would come back here again and again. I mean, the whole college was like home base to me. I lived in little rooms in the city then, but when you came back to Black Mountain, that was home base. I participated then in everything that was going on for the short time that I was there. It was very special. It's still home base for me in a way today because we were always nomads in Europe. Father's jobs never lasted more than six or seven years at one time. That's how these engagements were in Europe for conductors. He was an opera conductor. So, we were used to constantly being on the move. I had a marvelous mother who really knew how to make a very wonderful home, no matter where we were, no matter what the economic circumstances were, during the emigration. Also both of them were very much into the arts. So it was almost natural that both my sister and I also went into the arts. Trude more so than I. She became a weaver. I always wanted architecture and then from there I went to – I had a teacher who taught architecture as well as stage design, and he then pushed me into it, which I liked. I then came back to Black Mountain annually for all the years that both my father and mother were there. Then my sister eventually came from Europe.



I can talk about her later if you want. Mother stayed, of course, longer, too. I knew Black Mountain from year to year, and the changes, and met a lot of the new students and teachers. It was always – even through the last years that I was there – a unique place. It was still always for me a going back to something that's almost home base. So, what else would you like me to say about Black Mountain –

**MEH:** We'll come back to a lot of things now. I'll ask you a lot of questions. One question is do you remember – you came over on a ship, and you landed in New York?

**LA:** Yeah.

**MEH:** Do you remember – First, in New York, before you came down to Black Mountain, were you staying with friends there?

**LA:** I was staying with my parents. They were still there. They lived up on 103rd Street and had a little apartment. I stayed with them. But it was just simply in preparation of coming to Black Mountain, because I came in August and September the year started. So, I just had just a taste of the city.

**MEH:** Do you remember how you physically traveled to Black Mountain the first time?

**LA:** The train. Definitely train. That already was an impression, especially when you got down into North Carolina, and you wound through those wonderful hills and mountains. It was fabulous. But I couldn't get over, I'm afraid, on the train already as well as in the stations down there, the separation, racial separation. That was unbelievable to me that that still existed in this country. While at Black Mountain it was so isolated and insulated. As much as we all loved all the areas

and Asheville and the little place where we used to go to dance with the jukebox and so forth, we actually were not connected with the North Carolinians who were sort of the ordinary citizens, or certainly not that whole different color line. We had wonderful people as you well know working in the kitchen who we were all very friendly with and were accepted. But there was still something that was foreign to me down there about that color-line. We really exactly didn't experience it too much other than when we traveled on the buses or the trains. Whenever there were trips to Asheville, it was with those few students who had cars.

Oh, I have to tell you one of my first impressions of Black Mountain. The first evening when I arrived and all the students were so wonderful. They said, "Do you want to go with us to" that little bar, I've forgot?

**MEH:** Peek's, or Roy's?

**LA:** Roy's. "For a beer and maybe jukebox." Jukebox was totally new to me. So we went and one of the teachers – That was also new for me: the teacher going out with the students! first name basis! a foreign land, marvelous. So, we sat there, and they tried to teach me some of those steps (LAUGHS). I only knew waltzes and foxtrots. We wound up – the teacher wound up drunk on the floor, and we had to carry him home! That was my first impression (LAUGHS) of Black Mountain – that freedom, that kind of let-go. I had also a little difficulty fitting into that because I was so used to formality, and that education and living are two entirely different things. Also, what really was difficult for me was – I found the students had such ease in expressing themselves. They had such

ease sitting on the roof back there, cross-legged, with the typewriter in front of them instead of sitting at (SIC) a desk all dressed up typing. Oh, they would write whole novels on their knees, just like they will today with the computer. This was something I never learned. There was always that thing – we were brought up for perfection – of a comma, of just a letter. So, I never learned that. I still have great difficulties in writing because there was a sort of – A lot of them couldn't spell, but they could write, and to have the nerve to write a whole paper full of spelling mistakes. I mean, my son did the same thing. He still does it today – and he's a writer. So, that really – All those things you had to learn, which I had totally no ability for, just kind of freeing yourself of all these confinements that we learned, of disciplining yourself to do a good looking paper. Ridiculous. I mean, I gave that up later in terms of the work I did to free myself more in terms of drawing and building models.

That is where I learned so much from Albers is making models, because of paper construction. I had done models before, but he made me see things on the flat paper – how plastic it really is that you can bend things here and there. All this was wonderful.

**MEH:** In Europe, were you aware of the Bauhaus at all?

**LA:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But I had nothing to do with it. The theater there that I went to was Max Reinhart's theater. It was a little different kind of theater. My sister went to another Bauhaus type school, Halle an der Saale in Germany. She was more aware of the Bauhaus than I was. I was aware through my parents who knew about it and had lived in a kind of very select and modernist way. We

were brought up as Europeans with a kind of, a certain kind of ethic. It was not just the behavior, but in the manner in which you lived, the manner in which you made a home, which was always very personal and very beautiful. So, this is where I think mother was tremendous because Father was totally into music. It's very interesting – excuse me if I jump – I've just now received a book that – letters by Anton Webern – you know the composer with whom my father studied – Schoenberg – they were music students at the same time. The book is that thick, and with annotations, superb annotations done by a Swiss but written in German and published in German. I read all the annotations because it told me so much about Father's career and stuff, because at home he made music, and when he was out, he would make music, and he did a tremendous amount of work. So, I know that for him also the immediate adjustment to teaching unprofessional students was a tremendous mental adjustment, but he loved the way Black Mountain was situated and loved, eventually, the students because he saw how much talent there was. He learned how to teach. He had never really taught before. He had really only worked with professional musicians. So, he thought at first it was a come-down, but it was far from it. It was much more. As I say, this involvement of both teachers and students. So, for him, for my parents, it had a [was] very different than for me, I think. I knew I was on the run, in a way, and that BMC was just an interlude for me. But lasting – lasting forever.

**MEH:** We'll come back. Let's come back to Albers and sort of dwell on him for a while.  
Your training had been more in theater – was that at the Kunstgewerbeschule.

[OVERTALK]

**LA:** Theater. I was at Kunstgewerbeschule, which is an art school. It's like an  
academy.

**MEH:** Was that a general art school at that point, or were you studying theater then?

**LA:** I first started general, then went into architecture. As I say, that teacher felt I  
should go into the theater. I had all my life loved theatricals and went of course  
early on to operas and plays. I loved movies. Well, who didn't? Also in many  
ways thanks to my mother. She was wonderful about that. I loved festivities like  
we would – she made a lot out of those things. She made all the decorations,  
and when we had parties, children's parties, she would make costumes for us. I  
know in Black Mountain they did costumes and things too. In Vienna they had a  
combined theater course at the Kunstgewerbeschule, with the Max Reinhardt  
Institute. I actually ended there with a diploma in stage design and costume  
design. Then Hitler came, and I had to get out. Because we had Czech  
citizenship, we were never harmed in those countries. We were very fortunate  
that in the beginning Hitler would only put the German Jews away or the  
Austrian Jews. But being we had those papers, we were protected. That's why I  
say when I came to Holland and all that ran out, I had nothing anymore. But I  
keep on jumping back and forth.

**MEH:** That's okay. Coming back to Albers. Your training had been fairly traditional in  
Europe.

**LA:** It had been traditional, but I knew about avant garde theater, and I knew about the Bauhaus theater, of course.

**MEH:** How did Albers conduct his class? You took the color and you took the Werklehre.

**LA:** I did Werklehre and Drawing, of course. Very good drawing class.

**MEH:** Let's go to color. How did he conduct his color class?

**LA:** Well, color, he taught his color theory, and again by showing samples of what one color does to another, spatial relationships, all these wonderful things that you learn from his color theory. Then he asked us to make models. He gave us colored papers, and we came back with those cut color combinations. They had to be something that we had learned, either colors which change color because one penetrates two different colors, or it had to be a color that would disappear because it has the same hue as the other color. So, all these things were fascinating for me. As I said, paper construction was very interesting and also Werklehre because there you get all these wonderful textures which you had to find yourself and invent yourself. All these are totally applicable to any kind of theater. I always had the feeling that Albers really was not interested in theater in the traditional sense at all. He shunned it almost. But avant-garde theater, sure. He would have liked that. But, as I say, in my background in terms of theater, the European tradition still stayed so that when I worked in the theater here, I realized that the American designers worked differently from the Europeans. I assisted a lot of other designers to learn the method. Even after all, making simple drawings, the measurements are already different. Here the

theater was really behind. It was not yet a spatial theater. What counted was making a very pretty set, very romantic. Boris said it was romantic realism, which it really was. That was foreign to me. That I didn't – we didn't do in Europe. We used to do models, always, first, and then drawings from the model. Here it was the other way around. You made all the drawings first and then practically no models. Then I saw my husband Boris Aronson's stage designs, and I realized "I know this design – that's European." That I fell in love with right away, and I said, "I have to work for that man." So, that's how that started. But actually in the beginning I worked for another European by the name of Harry Horner who had then wound up first on Broadway. I worked with him and he was wonderful. He paid me practically nothing, but it was excellent for me to learn a lot. Then he would go summers to Hollywood – because he did movies and there was no summer season in the theater. So, then I would go to a summer theater and do my own designing, so to say. It wasn't much you could do. There was always time to go to Black Mountain, either at Christmas or certainly in summer.

**MEH:** Let's come back to Black Mountain again. We're going to go back and forth.

What was Albers like as a teacher, as a personality?

**LA:** Oh, well, he could be very strict and severe or he could be very amusing and sort of sarcastic at times and hurt, too. He could be hurtful.

**MEH:** Hurtful, not hurt.

**LA:** No. Hurtful. Good gracious, no. So, one was always slightly afraid of him, or in awe, except a couple of students that I remember (LAUGHS) who actually were

sort of revolting against him – like de Niro, who came from the Hofmann school of painting, so he swore by Hofmann, who was closer to Abstract Expressionism. He didn't go for the Albers discipline in his own work. The beauty about Albers was, I found, that he was very different as a teacher than he was in his own work, I think. You appreciated his work more than if he had taught us to be little Alberses. Well, there may be some who were much influenced by him, but he could teach others. As you know, some who weren't even art students who just took his teaching and his theory.

**MEH:** You've mentioned the paper work, the work with paper, properties of paper. Do you have any other particular recollections about the Werklehre class? Or his design class.

**LA:** Design class. Yeah. I mean, what he said in actual words, except again this awareness of what you can do with different materials to make them change, in a way, become something else or relate to each other in a way that you wouldn't know unless you put them together in a certain way. I imagine he must have told us to go into the woods and pick up leaves and so forth, and twigs and whatever. I remember I made one that he even photographed, so it must be in his files, where I collected bottle tops. If you remember, the old schoolbooks that one had in those days, they had sort of a dappled black and white cover. I would put these – paste these bottle tops on them and then blacken them with what do you call it? Well, like from when you burn something. You just blacken them with the smoke.

**MEH:** The charcoal, or whatever.



**LA:** Charcoal, yeah. It sort of started to meld into the background, and they sort of did something to it – It became something else. They were not bottle tops any more, and the paper became something more plastic – whatever. It's one of those things that he photographed. There were some others that he photographed. Then he would pick out of that bunch that we all did, and point it out what was good about them. I imagine some did not work. Or he would ask us for opinions first, before he said something. It was always instructive, and, at the same time, I always shivered. I thought, "Oh my God, what is he going to say!" Especially because I was still terribly unsure of myself in every way, so I always thought, "God, what am I going to get from him now!" He knew that. I'm sure that he knew it. He made fun of it, but in a nice way. I never resented anything.

**MEH:** Always in a nice way?

**LA:** I found it – It never did any harm to me. You could laugh it off later.

**MEH:** And you were accustomed to a more authoritarian –

**LA:** Exactly!

**MEH:** So this didn't bother you like it did some of the Americans.

**LA:** No. No. No. I'd encountered ten times worse, where it had no meaning. People would just – Teachers were horrible the way they treated their students. No, there was always something amazing about that man. I didn't know Anni very well. I must say I didn't know her at all actually. Just socially, occasionally. We students had certain groups and the teachers had their groups, and the Alberses had a very special group of course, as you know. You felt once in a

blue moon included, and I mostly because of my parents. That's all. Those wonderful Dreiers, whom I really adored, both of them. Yes.

[TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION]

**MEH:** We were talking still about Albers.

**LA:** I can add one other thing. It's just a little thing, but it's so typical for him. Like we had for drawing class, which I really loved, set up a table, a round table – this made me think of it – with straight chairs set up all around it. We were supposed to draw it. Sure we started with a chair and with the table. Then he pointed some which he felt which were better than others. He said, "You have to look at it as a whole. You can see it in a way as though the chairs are actually dancing around the table." Now, that was a whole different way of looking at it, a whole different way of drawing. That meant a lot to me in terms of my design work later, or the theater work. Or even the most marvelous thing is how he taught – Ruth was so good at it – the drawing just the essentials of a portrait and let the empty space fill it out so that space as such has a meaning. It depends naturally what you put into it, but to do as much as you can with as little as you can. That was something that absolutely was I thought great. Meant a lot to me.

**MEH:** Now you were saying, and several people have commented that there were cliques at the school.

**LA:** Yes.

**MEH:** Who were part of the Albers's inner circle?

**LA:** Well, it was partly Anni's choice, I guess. Her two best students, which were Don Page and Reed, who were always with her. That was her entourage. I think John was part of it – John Stix. He can tell you more about it. Fernando, who was this handsome young man who had come from Spain. In terms of women, well, I think – who were they? You know, I can't remember even who they were. But as I say, I was not totally part of that circle. Only once in a blue moon I would get invited there. The same was true in a way with the Dreiers. But they were very close, and so it was understandable. We were all so influenced in the way we furnished our rooms. Everything was covered in white with one color spot here and there.

**MEH:** This was your study.

**LA:** Studies, which were made from nothing. I mean, a mattress or an old car seat that we picked up somewhere. All these things were fantasyland for a young person. Orange crates galore were part of the furniture. All this came basically out of Albers's ideas. We all lived well and felt we had excellent taste (LAUGHS). Then that was in the old building I'm talking about. In the new building? Well, I guess they did similar things, but don't forget, our quarters were only temporary. They only were there for the winter semester. In spring when school closed, we had to empty everything out and put all the furniture up in the attic or throw it out and start from scratch. That made it fun, too, because you had a different room, and you never knew what you were going to put in. I never lived as a student at Lake Eden, only at Lee Hall, and so we shared a bedroom with one other person. All these things made for sometimes difficulties

(LAUGHS) and not necessarily students who had anything in common with each other. It doesn't matter.

**MEH:** At Lee Hall you had, you shared a room for sleeping.

**LA:** For sleeping.

**MEH:** And then you had your own studio.

**LA:** Studio, yes. There was always a fight for the studios facing the front naturally.

**MEH:** What did you do to your studio?

**LA:** I can't remember. Sort of more or less what the others did. Cushions and we sat on the floor or on a cushion and you tried to make it a little more lush and romantic. Oh, there was a lot of – The romanticizing of course was very present. The wonderful thing at five o'clock in the afternoon, the tea in the big hall downstairs, and then the Saturday evening dance. Oh, it was all great.

**MEH:** What did you have for tea? Did you have like tea and cookies, or –

**LA:** Probably, yeah. I can't recall. It was something like that.

**MEH:** And Mrs. Lounsbury was there?

**LA:** Yes, she's the one who did it. It was marvelous.

**MEH:** Do you have any memories of her?

**LA:** Just physically. Not as a person. I hardly got to know –

**MEH:** What was she like physically?

**LA:** Well, sort of a very waspish little lady, and I can't remember her husband at all.

**MEH:** He was dead.

**LA:** Oh, I see. No wonder I can't remember. Yeah, I remember her. She was lovely – I mean, very nice and the way she did those teas, and we loved that. Then

one of the main centers was Evarts, John Evarts. He was part of that circle, too. Evarts made it wonderful for both the new faculty, those new arrivals, especially my father. He couldn't have made it without John, this adjustment to learning and loving the students and the students loving him. But he got a lot of help from Evarts there. Evarts was very helpful to me in convincing my parents that I should go to New York on my own which, of course, they thought it was crazy. He was always helpful to students as well. He also became sort of an important focus for all of us afterwards, those students who had had anything to do with him personally and those Saturday nights. He would – every time he came to New York from Europe or wherever he came from, he would have these reunions of a select few (LAUGHS). Well belonged to the Albers Circle, but that was already later, you see. That's when I visited, I got to know all those new people as they came in.

**MEH:** What was Evarts like? How do you remember him when you were at Black Mountain?

**LA:** Well, I remember him from Black Mountain always as a very sweet person and always very helpful and always playing this wonderful music – songs of the period. Then he composed his own music, and we all learned them and sang them. It was great fun. I remember him more towards the end. I'm afraid he was a heavy drinker, but when he came to New York, he would either stay with Leslie and Jane, or stayed a couple of times with John, and then even with me here. He had friends over there from earlier periods. Being he was such a close friend to Father, he introduced us to some of his friends here and in New York,

because my parents, too – at Christmas vacation they would always go to New York to hear music and to do all kinds of visiting friends and museums and all this to refresh themselves. A lot of the guests– everybody went home. So for me, as I say, these were all fleeting impressions because I went to so many, many places. Therefore, it was great to really have a chance of belonging and having a circle of people that you still saw throughout your life, that you had so much in common with. I mean, even someone like Fernando, and Ellie, who is an artist. But Fernando, who became a business person, who got so much out of Black Mountain. We always talk about it – I mean, the rare times that I see them. I also remember what's-his-name, Thurman, Bedford Thurman.

**MEH:** I know nothing about him.

**LA:** Ah! Well, I got a lot out of him, more than Wunsch in a way. He, at that time, taught Shakespeare at BMC. Well, I had read Shakespeare in German. I had no idea of Shakespeare in English, and I found it frightfully difficult. I mean, I still find it frightfully difficult. But he made us understand Shakespeare in a wonderful way, and we had to write papers. I remember I had such a difficult time with those papers. I would always go to my father and tell him to help me. I could write them in German. Then he would help me translate them. I was so, so bad in writing English. But I got – in terms of theater – almost more out of him in theater literature. He didn't do any directing or anything . He was an actor, essentially. Wunsch was just nice, and he did a lot, and he directed a few things. You know, John and I were together in Gabriel Borkman, of all things.

**MEH:** You had a role in that, I believe.

**LA:** Teeny, weeny role.

**MEH:** Were you Frida? (OVERTALK)

**LA:** Frida, yeah, she's a child (INAUDIBLE), yeah. Terrible! Then we did this Macbeth. My God! Well, I didn't act in that. I just designed the costumes for it. Sue Spayth was Lady Macbeth and John was Macbeth. We built a whole construction in the sports place there, what was it? Sort of a basketball area. George Randall did the building and designed the set. It was all platforming. I designed terribly simple outfits with Black Mountain jewelry. We all did that very simple crowns and ah! Then I remember John Stix's mother came and wanted to make sure that everything was – money was spent.

**MEH:** Had she contributed money for this?

**LA:** She contributed a little – No, she later came and contributed. I don't know to what extent. Wanted to make sure that John was dressed properly, whatever. But she was quite a woman. I liked her, actually. So, that was a production. I can't remember what else we did there.

**MEH:** Let me see if anything triggers– Waiting For Lefty? Odets (OVERTALK).

**LA:** That was before me, before my arrival at BMC.

**MEH:** Okay. Now I have a note here that you did that, and you did the scenery with George Randall for that?

**LA:** Yeah. No. Not for that.

**MEH:** Not for that. Okay. Ah! Wilderness?

**LA:** Yeah, I think we did that, yes.

**MEH:** You worked on it. I had a note that you worked on it and you were stage manager.

**LA:** Could be! (LAUGHS) I don't even remember.

**MEH:** And did costumes and scenery.

**LA:** Yes.

**MEH:** Then there was Macbeth. The great Macbeth. What do you remember about that performance?

**LA:** Well, it was wooden, very wooden. I'm sure John will tell you more about it. I had all these photographs – I think I gave them to John, or he gave them to somebody – that Haas had done. Do you remember?

**MEH:** Haas? (OVERTALK)

**LA:** Haas, Maude Dabbs. He photographed it in minute detail. I think I must have showed it to you. I don't know where it is. It was wooden is all I can say. Yeah – Maude was almost my father's favorite student. He really loved her in a sense of her work and her looks and everything. Of course, he and Jane got on fine.

**MEH:** The other things I've made a note here were The Time of Your Life. Do you remember that? The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden by Wilder.

**LA:** I don't think that was at Black Mountain.

**MEH:** Yeah, they were there. But they were minor productions.

**LA:** Those were summer theater productions.

**MEH:** No, they were that year.

**LA:** They were there? It could be that I did one. I don't believe it. I can't remember. I tell you I can't remember. I couldn't have done very much for them.



**MEH:** See what I have here: the evidence is here. Okay, this is the Borkman. I'll just show this to you to see if it triggers any – This is a copy of the program.

**LA:** Oh really!

**MEH:** Really. I come with evidence.

**LA:** You do indeed! Well, I only remember I didn't know what I was saying. I mean, I just mouthed it, whatever came out. I knew when to come on and when to go out. I got one sentence probably. I remember I wore a huge hat. I don't know who did the costumes for that. "Settings by Lisa." Well, I don't even remember that. It wasn't (UNINTELL WORD).

**MEH:** Ah Wilderness – that was the note I made –

**LA:** Oh yeah! (OVERTALK) Malek, I remember working with him. Yes, yes. Yes. Oh, yes.

**MEH;** What was Malek like? He's another person I really know nothing about.

**LA:** He was very theatrical. He was one of like these old-fashioned actors. He'd talk and behave that way. He was tall, rather handsome. He looked like a quasi-Barrymore. Totally the old-fashioned kind of actor, but a nice man. I actually liked him. He then changed his name and married a – she became a designer. She came there later, I remember. Kirk or Kuntz.

**MEH:** Kuntz.

**LA:** Yeah, I met her at Black Mountain and later in New York too. Yeah, yeah. I was stage manager. I don't remember that. Well, I must have enjoyed it. It's just in hindsight I would say it's a blank, the whole thing. It didn't mean much because

I had done more interesting things already in Europe. So, the theater wasn't much. No. That definitely – that was before my time.

**MEH:** No, look, you'll find your name on the program.

**LA:** What! What? No. I don't see it.

**MEH:** Let me see.

**LA:** No!

**MEH:** Yes. Scenery.

**LA:** I did the scenery for that! (LAUGHS) It couldn't have been much scenery. Oh, my God. Well, probably George Randall did it. I don't know. I probably made a drawing –

**MEH:** It wasn't a major event in your career.

**LA:** I know, it must have been a platform because that's all you need for that, you know. I can't even remember the performance.

**MEH:** The tape is running out. I have to put a new tape in.

**[END OF AUDIOCASSETTE 1, SIDE 2. SIDE 1, TAPE 2 BEGINS]**

**MEH:** [IDENTIFICATION GIVEN] Now, we were talking about what?

**LA:** The theater experience, my theater experience at Black Mountain, all the shows that were put on. Well, I'm afraid they're pretty much of a blank because, as you can see, I could hardly remember what I did there. There were so many things that I had to take and were impressions, that it really didn't stand out and didn't come anywhere near what I got out of, as I say, the classes mostly with Albers. So, I would say that in the short time that I was there, a year and a half, theater was for me secondary. It was only because George Randall was very

good. He was interested in the theater, and he knew construction, and I knew something about theater. I think that was the reason they used us. There just weren't too many people. I think Albers' students weren't interested, really. Rightfully so. So, whatever they were, they could have been only the simplest of sets and costumes. I think they were maybe a little more elaborate later on. Wasn't Schawinsky there at one time?

**MEH:** It was earlier.

**LA:** That was earlier? Well, I met him there. I remember that. I even met him still in New York. His wife was the one who taught us paper folding. She was there for a short time. Then later they did so much more down at Lake Eden. More in the spirit of –

**MEH:** Did you take any classes – You took Albers' class. Did you take any music?

**LA:** No, I didn't take any music (chorus only). I wanted really mostly theater, because of my – I had difficulty with language, [so I felt I'd know something about it may be easier for me. [MEANING NOT CLEAR]] Although, as I say, the course with Bedford Thurman was fascinating for me. Difficult but worthwhile.

**MEH:** Because you were really learning English at that point.

**LA:** I was learning – Yeah, I was still learning English. It was the second year, actually, when he came and I was there. Then, as I say, it was really – Albers was my one teacher. I don't think I took any other classes really. I may have visited a class here and there. We were allowed to do that. But no, I just did that.

**MEH:** Do you remember ever going to the town dump to collect stuff for Albers' classes?

**LA:** No. That I didn't know. No, that's interesting. No. I remember going to the woods and collecting things, but not the dump. Then the only other thing I remember very well is when we were put into the program of starting to build the Studies Building at Lake Eden. There was a Work Program and you had to work first on the farm and then you had to dig ditches. That's sort of the period I was there.

**MEH:** What sort of things did you do in the Work Program?

**LA:** In the farm, haying, I remember, and the ditch-digging. Digging the ditches. That's what I did.

**MEH:** I mean, you had come from definitely not a rural background.

**LA:** No, but I had spent summers in the country, so I knew a lot about it and loved farms and all that, very much. I knew how to ride horseback – farm horses – and so forth, although we didn't over there. Then I was at Lake Eden for one summer as a waitress. I think it was probably the first summer. That was fun – a totally different experience. Some of the college students were there and we had outsiders coming in and guests. It was kind of fun.

**MEH:** Did you wear little waitress's costumes?

**LA:** Oh sure, sure. Yes. We had waitress's costumes, all of us. But in the afternoon when we were free, we could go and swim.

**MEH:** Did you swim in the lake?

**LA:** Yes, always in the lake. Yeah. Another very strong memory I have is – and that may have been later when I wasn't a student, when I was a – Yeah, I think I was just visiting at Black Mountain when there was a flood down at Lake Eden. I was visiting when it was flooded and we lost one of the students.

**MEH:** Frank Nacke. What do you remember about that?

**LA:** Well, I remember mostly that we couldn't get out and that I had a boyfriend up in New York who read about it and came down to rescue me (LAUGHS). But he couldn't get in. Then I do remember when we finally found Nacke, we all went out and you could see the washed up body. Terrible.

**MEH:** Now we were talking about the Work Program. How did you adapt to living in jeans and in informal dress? Were you comfortable?

**LA:** Easily! Loved it. I mean that was no problem at all (LAUGHS). I never shed it. Still like it best of all. No, the nice thing for us was actually the getting dressed on Saturday night. The whole idea was not to have the same dress all the time. Sometimes we borrowed things from other people and pinched them back, or we made things like a skirt or something. It was all very simple, but still you wanted to look nice.

**MEH:** These were long skirts?

**LA:** Long skirts. There again Mother was so wonderful. I mean, she had golden hands – whatever she touched. She would make things. Wonderful. Long skirts and a blouse, and that's about it. Then there was the dancing, and I was always a wallflower because – well, there were some beautiful girls. I did dance a little bit, but not very much. So, I became a very happy observer. I always am. Still

am. (LAUGHS) There was a little drinking going on beforehand when we all had cocktails at our various little groups – invited each other and that was very important. Everybody got things sent from home and some were more spoiled than others (LAUGHS), so they had nicer things.

**MEH:** Things like food.

**LA:** Like food, yes. And fruit and things. Wonderful things sometimes. Then again there comes the same resourcefulness: when you make a cocktail party, make it nice and make it look nice, but in the Albers way. Not with money and yet special. Yet some had money, of course. But even they, they had to bring it down. It was always to bring out – I mean, something that says something about yourself, in a way. That was also terribly important, if you can imagine, at this age.

**MEH:** Where were the parties held? Were they in your study, or – ?

**LA:** In the studies, always in the studies. Some people had Mexican things. That was the big thing, introduced also by the Alberses when they came back from Mexico with great praise and all sorts of things that they had brought. The Mexican influence was stronger than, say, the Japanese, because after all it has a certain simplicity and essence and beauty. Some students just couldn't tear themselves away from there, and on the other hand others who just couldn't stay really and wanted to get out. So, I sort of was in between. In one way, I loved it because it made me feel sort of special. But at the same time I wanted to get out there and do something. I always wanted more theater. So, I would say that – That's more or less what I can tell you about Black Mountain.

**MEH:** Did you ever go into the area, like to Asheville?

**LA:** Yes, we went there on special occasions, to buy things mostly. Get things. But I don't have much of a memory of Asheville. I only went there occasionally.

**MEH:** You must have had limited means at that point.

**LA:** Totally. Totally. I mean, practically none. I don't know where I got money – probably from my parents a little bit.

**MEH:** Had you been able to bring anything from Europe?

**LA:** Bring over? Well, mother did. I did, practically nothing, because I had gone through so many places already. Mother brought things, and a lot of it was in storage, but she brought a few things. Just for themselves. Not for me, no. No. But, as I said, while I was there, you could only stay such a short time because we had to empty it for – what is it? YWCA? There was no sense of anything permanent. That made it attractive, too, in a way. We had already lived, so to say, with low means in Europe, so for me I didn't deprive myself of anything. What more can I tell you?

**MEH:** Let's see if I can – Who were the – [INTERRUPTION]

**LA:** Richard Lloyd Andrews. We called him something –

**MEH:** You called him Dick.

**LA:** Well, Dick I knew very well. He was interested in painting railroads, and he was another – He was, I think, he also came from a different school of painters and also sort of revolted a little bit against Albers at the time when I was there as a student. Leonard Billing I knew. He was a very good student. Derek Bovington,

oh, he was so handsome. Cynthia Carr, too. She belonged to that circle, the elite circle.

**MEH:** What do you think qualified you for being part of the elite circle?

**LA:** Goodlooking, very good – very much liked, by certain students, and I don't know. She – I think she came in – Wasn't she with Chuck Forberg at that time?

**MEH:** I'm not sure.

**LA:** Well, then Chuck later of course went with Ati, but I remember her – I think she was very early, Chuck's original girlfriend. Cynthia Carr, yes. Maude I remember very well. De Niro I got very friendly with. Oh, Charles (UNINTELL NAMES READ FROM LIST) . I remember vaguely Ann Furnas. Was she a secretary? No, she was a student. Rudolph Haase, I remember. Jamis – Oh, Jimmy Jamieson I knew very well, yeah. He had a room on the same floor that I had – right across from me, and his wonderful mother. Yes, yes, and every time – When I was in Boston, sometimes I would go see her. She also supplied my parents with the piano – she gave them the piano. I mean, supplied, she gave them the piano right over there. Leslie Katz was a very dear friend always – before and after.

**MEH:** What was he like at Black Mountain?

**LA:** He was music – I only remember him playing music, as a music student. Gentle, very gentle, and very nice just to know as a friend. He and Jane Mayhall were already very close at that time, and so I became very close to both of them. We then – when I came to New York – shared a duplex in the Village, although they came later than I. They stayed at Black Mountain longer.



Leslie was just wonderful. I liked him as a person, that's all I can say. He didn't go to any of Albers' classes actually. He was writing. I don't know what classes he studied, where he went, what he did. But he was a music student, I remember that. Fernando, I remember he came the same year I did. Bernard Malek, I remember. John Martin. Bela, very well. He was there at that time. Don Page, yes – did wonderful work. I remember that. I see him still sitting on that roof, working on his weaving. Well, there are so many that were at that time. Mary Rose Riegger. Her father of course was a composer and we got friendly. Sue Spayth I was very friendly with. Hope Stephens, I got very friendly with. She was in Albers' class, yeah. Swackhamer also I know well, and Willimetz I knew very well, too. I mean, all these people were friends in a way. (UNINTEL NAME), Oh God! Eva Zhitlowsky. I was friendly with her.

**MEH:** What were the Black Mountain students like compared to the students you had known in Europe?

**LA:** In Europe? They were just freer, more open, more receptive. I had some very good and very bad experiences in Europe. When I went to art school – I'm telling the bad experiences – was simply – During the student year, it was wonderful but it became very highly political. We separated into party interests and then some of them were outright Nazis. They were the first ones to close the school and took out all the Jewish students and Jewish teachers and put them in – arrested them. Not me, because I was a Czech citizen. That was my luck. I had such a basically good time going to that school and had made some friends. I didn't even want to leave Vienna, but my mother and my cousin

physically came from Czechoslovakia to get me out. So, there again, everybody constantly saved my life. I have no idea why. But I was very fortunate. So, the students, in a sense, in Black Mountain were much more talented I find than the students I encountered in Europe, because there I went to a school where there was a "school" of painting, a "school" of doing stage design, and you just tried to fit in. The ones who fitted in the best were, so to say, the best – So I just got friendly with a few girls in that school. What I liked is that I was on my own, and we had sort of a Bohemian way of spending our time. But still it was strict schooling. But what you gained in America – it was more colorful, I find. The diversity was so wonderful, even from the different parts of this country. It was as much a part of nature as a place, and that's what I liked. Yet they all brought something with them that they – other had brought from home or from life. It was – really opened you up to everything. The living together was probably at times terrible for some. Therefore, as I say, those cliques were essential, the little groups. I don't know which was worse. For the teachers, probably, because they were constantly invaded by their students. I know my parents would complain sometimes. They had no private life whatsoever. But the interesting thing, with all that freedom, there was always a certain formality. This getting together over tea, or for a conversation, or over a concert, which had a certain form. Now, that I think it lost in later years, what it became. When I visited, I could see more of a community and not – you didn't have the sense of the early college that was still influenced by academia really. I mean, the very fact that you could graduate, if you wanted to.

**MEH:** I think that those customs, such as afternoon tea and dressing formally on Saturday night and dressing for dinner – somehow if you don't have a structure of rules and regulations, you have to have customs that somehow give form to the society. It seemed that it was a very genteel society in a sense.

**LA:** It was, it was, which was so amazing. It's been only when the more radical forces entered into the picture. Times were changing, and the War and everything, that it became in a way more of the reality of what happened later on. I mean, open living and communal living, which was formless, as you said, which had a form of its own, I would say.

**MEH:** A different –

**LA:** A different form. But it gave up certain things that, well, maybe time was ready for it to go. I still believe in it, personally. As I say, there's a certain ethic involved that I believe one has to have in order – especially if you go through a lot of turmoil – that you have to have a structure, as you say. I think this was very free time. The structure was – people were throwing away structure, wasn't it, right after the War? Everybody was sort of opening up – you know, the fifties after all, the sixties were almost just a reflection of what happened in the fifties down in Black Mountain. These people still go on. That – yeah, I will tell you later. Excuse me for calling you, dear, but that's sort of a theatrical expression.

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

**LA:** Oh, meals – Oh, they were good. They were fun, also, in terms of – Seating, very important. You helped yourself in sort of buffet style, and then where you

sat was important because the table was full of conversation. It just all went on and on and on. It just never stopped. Yet, you had your favorites, or your boyfriends, or you trying to make a girl or a boy, so meals were very important and very relaxed. The food was so-so for me. I mean, some was so Southern I couldn't take it, but that is unimportant. I think – didn't breakfast, I think we could actually take things – No, no, we had to have breakfast together, too. Yeah, I remember now. Yes, yes, right.

**MEH:** I've heard there was an Albers table and that you really could not sit there unless you were invited.

**LA:** Could very well be. I wouldn't be a bit surprised. I mean, I wasn't aware of all those things. But then people who belonged there knew. They just – after a while it was known. It could very well be. I wouldn't be a bit surprised, yeah. Well, I thought it was fun. Then very often afterwards there was a concert or a lecture and it just went on and on. There were visitors, always invited interesting visitors. I think Odets was there, and Green, you know, the writer –

**MEH:** Paul Green?

**LA:** Yes, was there. Not the writers but – I'm talking about White Hall, you know, not down below. Did they call it White Hall in those days?

**MEH:** Lee Hall.

**LA:** Lee Hall, yeah. I knew it was white because I remember the mountains in snow. Lee Hall. By the way, it was quite different. You probably saw it now the way it is. It was very different. There was nothing built below and it really had that exquisite view. It really felt like the Magic Mountain because you were just on

top of the world all by yourself. That porch I'll never forget. Oh, did we paint and photograph those rocking chairs! All over the place. Yeah. I don't know if Albers gave painting classes. I never took any, so I don't know. I just took drawing and all the other things. The meals, I don't remember anything other than those – The dining – We had a Dining Room, you know, in the back there, and you'd hear the bell ringing for meals.

**MEH:** That was what you used for a theater also?

**LA:** Yes, we used it for everything – although for the big things like Macbeth, we used the Sports Hall.

**MEH:** Who were other refugees who were at Black Mountain?

**LA:** Oh, well, the Strauses were there at my time. Those were the only ones I remember, in terms of faculty. Yes, I knew them through my parents basically. I never saw them socially, at all. Then later you had more in Lake Eden. You know, the Hansgirgs first and then many people actually from Europe. I was there I remember when Einstein came and visited, and we all went to Lake Eden. This second wonder – I mean, he was standing there with his mane of hair blowing and talking to us. We were very impressionable with all his fame and wonderful people. But there were others that were really wonderful, and gave good lectures. They participated then in everything. They didn't just come for the lecture. They had to participate, whoever came, in other activities – go to a class or share a meal. All this was part of it. They wanted them to be – Most of them really admired it. I think there were some who wrote against it but I can't remember too well. I mean, I even eventually had Boris visit there, at the

time of Olson. But that was more or less the tail end when I was there with Boris.

**MEH:** How do you remember the Dreiers?

**LA:** Ted was always laughing. Very warm. So was Bobbie. There was a real bond with some of the students, but you couldn't get to know them too closely. I never did. I never got very close to them. Father was particularly happy with the Dreiers. She was wonderful towards my parents. When she had little parties, I was always invited. But I again never got to know them really. Just when I saw them. I didn't take his course or anything like that. No, I was sort of on the edge of that circle, too. I was taken in because of Father and Mother. They were a part of it. But not because they wanted to be elitist. They were just taken in. In fact they didn't like that exclusiveness at all. But I'm not sure, nowadays, that it was really. I mean, it was really exclusion of some people, like you said, but nothing more than sitting at the same table. But honestly I was really never a part of sort of the structure of it like some people. Again, even though I saw my parents often, I didn't get too close to Father to know what he was doing there. Only the one time when he did the series of operas, when he tried to introduce opera to people who had never seen or hardly heard of one. So he asked the students (I was not there anymore. I was already, I think, in New York) to illustrate, make illustrations for an opera. He wanted me to do The Magic Flute because I knew it so well. Reed did Don Giovanni, and then there was a third one. I don't know who did that. The idea was to make illustrations for practically each scene, indicating sort of characters that are always recognizable, the

same character, and do it in a very simplified version and indicate also the musical relationships as to duets or quintets or whatever. In a very simple, understandable way so that when he played the score, he would change the images so that they get a sense of both the image and who was singing and so forth. That was fun. I mean, that's the only time I participated with my father at Black Mountain, and I sent that, I remember, from New York. It was terribly simple. I did it with stencils and Reed did it with colored paper. It was a nice idea on his part. I think, I think I told you that already, that there was this first wife of Eric Bentley, Maya was her name, Maya somebody, who still has all the papers that, I mean, the lectures that Father gave on these operas. She told me that years ago. She's married to a musician, I think. I don't know where she lives or anything.

**MEH:** Well, remind me to talk about that later, because I know where she is. They should be saved. Let's go back now. Where were you born?

**LA:** Prague. In 1920.

**MEH:** Okay. Your father had been born in –

**LA:** In Brno, Brunn.

**MEH:** But he was reared in –

**LA:** In Vienna. He first wanted to be a doctor, a physician, and then changed to musicology. He first studied with a man named Guido Adler and met Webern there. Anton Webern, that same one I told you a book about, was a student there. They both had heard about Schoenberg. These went to Schoenberg and became his disciples. He was in that first group of Berg and Webern and

Jalowetz, and I believe there may have been one more. Very few students were very close to Schoenberg. He really stayed with him for the rest of his life, in terms of friendship, admiration and following and modern music of the era –avant-garde music, I should say. Then from Vienna – when he was still a student – his first engagement I believe was in Wiesbaden, Germany as a conductor, and then he went to conduct for Regensburg, also in Germany. Then he went to Danzig, where my sister was born. That's Gdansk, Gdansk, isn't it, today? Well, it's part of Germany now. It was Gdansk at that time. Then another town called Stettin and then eventually Prague, where I was born.

[TELEPHONE RINGS. INTERRUPTION IN TAPING.]

**MEH:** Okay, now here we go again. Now you were born in Czechoslovakia, and your father was pretty established in his career already at that point.

**LA:** Yes. Well, Prague was – yes, in a sense – was one of the high points of his career because of a man by the name of Zemlinsky who also belonged to that group of modern music, Viennese modern music. He was the head conductor in Prague. Father was second conductor. But he did, what I just found out from this book that I told you about, did so much work. It's unbelievable the amount of work he did in terms of new productions in Prague – classical and also modern opera, conducted a tremendous variety of operas. Then – Oh, I shouldn't look there. From there he moved to Vienna, and he was first conductor at what's called the Volksoper. It's the People's Opera House, which is not the major one but the second one, like City Opera here or at the State Theater. He was doing a lot of work there, and that was around '24 and '25, and



'25 he got his engagement in Cologne, in Cologne, Germany, which was a superb engagement for him. This is actually the longest time during my lifetime that we ever lived anywhere, which was from '25 to '33 – eight years. In summer – Then from Cologne, when Hitler came, he went to Vienna, trying to get work. There was very very little work because the big immigration had started. All the famous conductors were coming from all over the place – they were all Jews – going to Austria. Somehow most of them were heading towards Russia. So was father because there was more need for musicians. However, he would have craved to go to America. He loved America, but there was no need yet for musicians. From what one knew, America had very little in the way of opera or concerts, very little interest in modern music. So, Vienna was sort of an in-between stop, with concerts and lectures. I think he did give private lessons at that time for piano students. Then from there he did get an engagement in Reichenberg, that's Czechoslovakia, Sudetenland, which was the German section of Czechoslovakia which then was taken over by Hitler very early on. So, he stayed there until '37, I think, and then went to Prague. Now he was directing his ideas already towards America, and Mark Brunswick was giving affidavits to musicians of the Schoenberg school because Schoenberg was already in America and Schoenberg was asking him to help to get his friends out. So my parents then went from Prague to America in 1938, I think. When they moved from Vienna to Czechoslovakia, Sudetenland, I stayed in Vienna. So, I had my schooling there at the art school, and then in '38, when – no '36 or '7, I'm not sure, '7 I guess – when Hitler took over Austria, I went to

Czechoslovakia for a very short time. Then it looked like Czechoslovakia would be drawn into the War. My sister lived at that time already in Holland – in Wassenaar – and I was “shipped” to Holland with the help of my parents. I stayed with my sister until August 1939. My parents went to America before me, and Father always thought he should get a position first before I come there. Yeah. So, I went there in '39. Left '39, and my sister remained, and I think you probably know everything about her. If you want I'll repeat it.

**MEH:** We will, but let's come back to that. So, you were, your early years – Were you aware in your early years – How old were you now in 1933?

**LA:** In '33 I was thirteen.

**MEH:** You were thirteen. So, you were still living at home.

**LA:** I was living very much at home, and when we had to leave, it was my first introduction to shock and not understanding what was going on. I had a whole world of friends, as you can imagine. I had to give up school and friends and a wonderful living. We lived very well there. First we had lived in an apartment on Salierring, which was sort of like one of the main thoroughfares of New York [Cologne] on the East Side. Then we moved to a little very nice suburb of Vienna, and I went to a very nice school, a lycée, which is where you learned modern languages. Of course, by force we all had to leave. But we had always gone in summers, every year we would go to Austria or Bavaria or the North Sea for the summer. When we first emigrated from Cologne, good friends in Austria invited us to go to Austria for the summer. So, Mother and I went there, and Father went to Vienna to try and get work. But when the school year

started, I had to go also to Vienna. I went to a totally different school which didn't suit me at all. It was called a Realgymnasium, where the emphasis was on mathematics and on the sciences. I was not at all inclined that way, and so I said to my parents, "I know a classmate who is applying to the Kunstgewerbschule." That meant I would never finish formal schooling, like a college. My mother said, "Impossible." But I had an uncle who was an architect whose work I very much admired, and I said he should help me out getting into that school. "Well," he said, "you have to take an exam." I said, "I will." So, the parents said, "If you pass the exam, you can go, and if not you go back to Realschule," So I passed it (LAUGHS) and they had no other choice than to leave me in Vienna when they went already to Czechoslovakia. But at that time I was already sixteen or so. I stayed, boarded with, very nice friends, whom they knew – and who had a daughter whom I loved. She was a French teacher, and she taught me French. I went to school and was a passionate art student, because you learn something about life for the first time and you are an art student inside and out of school. We did a lot of things together until all this politicking started and one became very much aware of what's happening. I stayed 'til after the Anschluss in Vienna and then went to Czechoslovakia for an interim. But it affected me, really, psychologically in a very bad way. I refused to eat and became anorexic. That was one excuse why I could get out of Czechoslovakia, because they didn't let planes go out anymore. I got from a doctor a certificate so I could leave because I'm emotionally not well, and I was signed up to see a doctor in Wassenaar. So I left again. I never knew if I would

see my parents again. But my wonderful sister put me up and I recovered very quickly (LAUGHS).

**MEH:** Did you have to cross Germany then to get there?

**LA:** Oh, well, you flew.

**MEH:** You flew, okay. Over Germany.

**LA:** Over Germany. It was really those years were traumatic, these few years when – I mean, my life was just torn everywhere. I went to shreds. I had no bottom, no foundation, nothing to hold on to. Basically I loved it in Holland. There too I went to an art school and lived with this wonderful Dutch couple who were quasi-foster parents. Near The Hague. But then when my parents finally got my visa, I came over here. This is my life. My past is just – I can't even believe it ever existed. It may have left its wounds. I'm sure it did. Black Mountain became my base in my new life, because when I go back traveling in Europe now, I really only like places I don't know – except maybe Italy. I like Paris a lot! But not countries, god forbid, where I lived – Austria. I refused to speak German when we were in Austria visiting. I refused to speak German in Germany even. I just have such a block about this whole period. I'm forgiving now, especially to the Germans – not the Austrians, ever.

**MEH:** Because?

**LA:** Well, I think their behavior was ten times worse against the Jews than the Germans – even after the War. Also I encountered – The reason I actually, one of the reasons I wanted to get out of the Realgymnasium into the art school – When I went to this gymnasium, there were already Nazis. They were dressed

like that. I mean, not uniform. They had their so-called secret but “recognizable” uniform. Fortunately, but unfortunately, I didn't look Jewish enough. I had blue eyes and light hair and white skin, and so they talked to me in the worst way about the Jews, not realizing it. I mean, this just floors you. I was too ashamed to admit it. So I said, "I have to get out of here. This is not my world." I needed an art school where you could shed all this and be open. I was so lucky in all my life, I cannot get over it. This was also what Black Mountain meant. I'm sure it wasn't only for me. It was for all the people who came from Europe, a haven after what everybody went through. My mother was so resourceful. Every time wherever we lived, she made our lives as special as you could make it. I mean, even if it was done with nothing, like at Black Mountain. That was wonderful for Father. So, he actually, other than his own problem not getting the kind of jobs as he was used to, that part – the living – was always very nice, just the way he liked it.

**MEH:** Before 1933, you were a very young child at that point. Were you really aware of people like Schoenberg and Berg and Webern – or were they just your father's friends?

**LA:** Oh no, no, no. I mean, we were totally brought up with that background. There was so much music-making in the house constantly. That's the reason I never went on with my piano lessons because I felt, "I'll never get anywhere with these kind of people in the house." We were very much a part of it, except only at dinner because the children didn't participate in all this “adult stuff” – the music-making. But we got to know all of them. They were “uncle” here and

“aunt” there, so we were very much a part of it and had to also behave a certain way. We were brought up by nannies essentially, when things were still well. So we lived children's lives, which were at that time somewhat separate from the parents. Father, we saw very little of him. He constantly was working and in the evening he didn't eat with us the meal. He would eat late. But Mother made a wonderful home life, nevertheless. The holidays, I would say, that was the big thing when we all got together, and the summers. We spent summers together, all of us, wonderful summers.

**MEH:** Your mother made a wonderful home. What was she like?

**LA:** Mother at home? Oh, she was strict as all get-out. My sister, who was an angel, she always kept everything to herself. I was spoiled. I was a spoiled brat and stubborn, so I spat everything out. I was very different as a child than I later became, and I really think I was sort of hemmed in a little bit by all these experiences of mine. Like, well, I would do things I wasn't supposed to do. Or Mother wanted certain behavior. Manners were important and certain behavior and dress and how you talked to friends. On the other hand, as I say, we loved each other, all of us. But the older I became the more strict Mother became and very opinionated. I always thought partly she had certain frustrations and so that was unloaded on the children. My sister managed to take it. I don't know what good it did for her, but I only found out later in life. I always thought oh, she was the one, the beautiful one. She was the one who was favorite and I was just a nasty little thing. As we found out much later in life, that she had the

same experiences I had, except she wouldn't burst out the way I did. I was spoiled beyond words.

**MEH:** Do you think you were spoiled more than she?

**LA:** Partly, I think it started out that Mother two years before me had another child, a boy, who suddenly died in infancy. It was influenza – the epidemic that went around at the time. So, when I was born, I was hovered over. I was something special in a way. The fact that I came along altogether ten years after my sister – so there was this big difference, too. My poor sister often had to do things for me because I just insisted on certain things. Her interest was not so much in theater. For me it was always, early on we used to play act and very much influenced by the movies. I was influenced by Mickey Mouse and my sister was influenced by jazz. She went into jazz in a big way, dancing, and she had a lot of boyfriends. I loved playing Mickey Mouse (LAUGHS). We did fun things. So, Mother also established a sense of closeness that was important. Of course, we were obligated to do certain things, and even after we lived separately, all of us, Trude in Holland and I in Austria and they in Czecho- – we were obligated to go see our parents at certain times and obligated to write at certain times, which we did, but therefore never quite got as close to our Mother, particularly, than we probably would have liked to have been. As you know, she was very generous and understanding of other peoples love affairs and whatever problems they had, but not with us. She was highly critical. She had to approve of this and approve of that. That's very typical though, by the way, for women of that generation. They had really strong personalities and also sort of had a way

of "how things had to be." Well, it's the whole period, which – thank god – we all shed later. Maybe much to our regret (LAUGHS).

**MEH:** But at Black Mountain – I think it's a big difference, whether it's your child or somebody else's. She was such a mother figure to so many people.

**LA:** She was a mother figure. That's exactly it. She could be that. She could be that. Why she was so different with her daughters, I don't know. That's why I say I think there was something in her that was really her anxiety or her –

**MEH:** The whole thing in Europe must have just put such a fright. She must have every day wondered where you were, because you were still a child then, essentially.

**LA:** Yes. She was also worried about Father, tremendously. Her life was totally centered around Father, really. She worried about his condition and his health. He was also frail at times. Worked terribly hard. He sort was – what do you call that? A workaholic. Everybody loved him, you know, and everybody wanted a piece of him. He was an enabler for other people and even for Mother. She had the strength of taking care of sort of the daily worries, while he just made everything possible for everybody else. He was very open, and very generous – giving of himself constantly and only, I think, believed in the goodness of people and was probably hit over the head sometimes when he didn't get what he wanted. But she was fantastic, Mother, as I say – so capable. She often was the provider. She would do little jobs because Father just didn't get enough money. I remember in Vienna (I read this now), when we came during the immigration, during those poor years, we moved practically every couple of



months into another place, staying with somebody or having a little apartment somewhere, because the means weren't there. I remember she and I eating sometimes lunch in a sort of – almost a soup kitchen. It wasn't. It was a worker's place, but it was very primitive. But never Father. For Father, she would always have a perfectly set table, with a meal and everything for him. Her life in every way was centered around him. She could also be hard on him, because she was critical of his work, which she knew not that much about. At the same time he always asked her for her opinion. I understand that even in that last concert when he died at Black Mountain that he looked at her and wanted to get her approval. So, it was extremely close. You know they were cousins. They were related.

**MEH:** No. The tape's almost out so let me change tapes. [BREAK IN INTERVIEW FOR LUNCH. TECHNICAL COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED.]

**[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1; SIDE 1, TAPE 2 BEGINS]**

**MEH:** Okay.

**LA:** I think I talked earlier about a letter exchange between Anton Webern, the composer, and my father. That Swiss scholar now made a huge book in German, putting all that correspondence together with tremendous annotations through which I found out a lot about my father and where he worked and his existence, where he was at one time, which I never knew. So, it was very revealing to me, the book. It's called, in English, Letters to Heinrich Jalowetz. The letters that Father must have written to Webern unfortunately don't exist. Apparently there was a house fire at the Webern's where all these things

burned. All of Father's papers – correspondence between him and Berg and Schoenberg and manuscripts and everything he has written. He wrote many articles and his whole career, are actually now housed at the Sacher Institute in Basel, Switzerland, which is a huge repository for modern music. It's only available to researchers – scholars and people like that. This is where this man found the letters and researched them intensely and made this book, which is great for me because I found out so much about Father and indirectly about Mother. A lot of these letters also mention Mother and me and my sister. So, it's really wonderful. I think I talked about his career, how widespread it was and how many places and actually most of a short endurance. We children were, as I said, the whole family was always nomadic. We were always on the move. But it was always interesting. So I was – we were used to change. But we always had a wonderful, intense circle of friends. Both my parents and my sister and I had our own circle of friends. So – although the immediate immigration years, of which there were many for all of us, may have affected me emotionally a little more than the others. The others adjusted better, even though my sister really went through ten times worse situations than I did. But she was ten years older than I, so she was already a professional when the War came. I was in my teens when I was just beginning to experience life. She had a rather established life and married a Dutch photographer and publisher of so-called avant garde literature. When the Nazis came – and we were already in America – when all the Nazis came to Holland, she had to disappear and went to live as a nanny with friends of theirs and had to take on a different name. The Dutch

gave her different papers, as though she was a West Indian, you know, because – East Indian, where am I? East India were colonies of Holland at one time, and there were a lot of East Indians living in Holland. They were dark-skinned and dark-eyed the way Trude was, so she could be accepted as such. Well, her husband was well-known, and he was taken into a work camp with a lot of intellectuals, because he was considered a degenerate. He was not Jewish. Actually neither was my sister. Well, I'll go back to that. We were not practicing Jews, but we never denied being Jewish. Trude's husband then, after work camp, eventually became part of the Dutch underground and was betrayed as a leader in the underground and tried by the Germans and was shot. My sister survived the War, and we then urged her to come to this country. She was very unwilling to come because she felt at heart very much at home in Holland and especially responsible in a sense for his family and everything. But then Father died suddenly, and Mother urged her to come to Black Mountain. At the same time, Anni Albers, who was a weaver and knew my sister, went on a sabbatical and asked her to come replace her. So, it was a natural for her to come to Black Mountain. She fitted in very well because, I mean, this was her kind of thinking, the way Black Mountain was set up. She stayed there for I don't know how long now – a couple of years, I guess, and then moved to California and had her own career – made her career in this country and her name and remarried. So, we as children, being we were ten years apart, grew up separately. As we got older we became closer and closer, but in terms of where we lived we were always quite far apart from each other. Yet our whole

family felt extremely close. My parents were cousins, direct cousins, and their mothers were sisters. So, there was always a tremendous closeness and maybe a little too close. (LAUGHS) But we just loved each other. It was only made a little bit difficult because, as I say, my mother had a very strong personality, which was very positive but hard on us as children. She treated us very much like children still when we were adults. Father had a great warmth and generosity and was a totally positive thinker, and passionate and full of enthusiasm in his work, in his life, although he suffered from depressions too – more from his work, overwork. So he quite often between engagements, when I look now in this book and see the amount of work he did, it's unbelievable. He, like many of those conductors and musicians, went to these places that are like spas – I mean, not Karlsbad, but similar places in Austria – it was called Bad Gastein and various places – where you could take the mineral waters and you get all these wonderful rubs and things and away from the world. This he did on his own. But then he would also travel with us in summertime, because he was a passionate mountain climber and a very good one. Webern was a very close friend of his, Anton Webern. They were born on the exact same day one year apart. They both married women who came from related families. There were so many parallels – uncanny. In temperament very different. But often helping each other with jobs and so forth. Besides all this kind of depressions or neuroses or whatever they were, this was the era of psychiatry and psychology and Freud. In fact Father knew Freud, and my parents knew the whole family. They all went for something, you know. Not analysis, but in the circle of my

parents there were always one or two psychiatrists, usually a woman, a female psychiatrist. They played a big part because these musicians were quite neurotic, a lot of them, because there was a lot of love and hate going on and competitiveness. They had an enormous correspondence. I mean, like we do telephone calls today. Now we stay on the phone for hours. They wrote mile-long letters to each other, and they are really amazing. I can't read all of them, they're just – it's all in German, it's just too much for me. But there was an intense correspondence between all of them. They were mad at each other when they didn't hear from each other for about a week, and one would tell the other I haven't heard from him and so-so-so. All egged on by Schoenberg who made their lives miserable. They just adored the man. To them he was a god. I mean, they started out with him as students. Of course, he was a revolutionary in his day, and a visionary at the same time. So it was the kind of adoration which was understandable for young musicians who were interested in the latest. They had the same adoration for Mahler and at first even in Wagner, but then they veered away from that. As long as all this took place in Europe, naturally they were all very close to each other. Then when they were all sort of broken up or died, then there was less close contact although they still honored Schoenberg 'til the last day he died. So as children we saw very little of our father, but both my sister and I just adored him. We just loved him. Those summer things were just wonderful. He was amusing. He could amuse children. He had nicknames for us and he – and we would – Christmas always prepare something personal. We either had to write something or draw something, or

what we loved to do for Father is – Mother would teach us duets and my sister and I would sing duets together. We just loved it and did that at Christmastime, with Mother playing the piano, we singing duets. That was sort of our thing for Father. So that, again, brought great warmth and togetherness. But we heard a lot of problems coming out, because my parents were so close to each other. I recognized that in a sense because my husband and I were that close, and so that a lot of things come out that you wish (LAUGHS) you could keep to yourself. But it's almost too close, I feel sometimes. Today, thank God, people realize it, you know, and it's not quite the same. But on the other hand, it was the glue that held us together during those difficult years. Spiritually and in enjoying life, that was Father. Mother was the practical one and also very innovative and constantly thinking of new things to do with her hands. She was extremely good with her hands. So I can't say I had a bad childhood. It was just an interrupted one, I would say, partially interrupted. Never had any sense of true sort of foundation other than this holding together of a family, and that extended to the wider family of uncles and aunts and so forth who were also very warm and receptive and wonderful towards us. So, one tries to naturally retain some of that, but the world goes on. I haven't thought about all this since god knows when, and I'm glad you let me talk (LAUGHS) and I can say it. But in terms of Black Mountain, this was a dream at a time when we had really gone through very grueling times, and so many question marks, so many anxieties were built up. Of course, Father, wherever he went after his career, after '33, always too many musicians. He didn't have the personality to push

himself. He felt always it was enough to just be what you are. I mean, he pushed in the sense of bettering himself, but not to reach positions in life, you know. He just didn't do that. Mother wasn't too helpful in that either, because sometimes it's the woman who can do it, and the man doesn't. I have really no picture of that end of his career. He was pushed by people who believed in him and worked with him, but then the competition got greater and greater. The same when you came to New York – there was just nothing in music positions. He never even thought of teaching until it was offered to him. So it was a first and in that sense, good. When he first came to Black Mountain, I know he had difficulties adjusting, and again it was mostly emotional.

**MEH:** Do you think he really felt alienated there from what was happening in music? He must have seen more pushy people getting positions and –

**LA:** He did. He did. He did. But not so much in Black Mountain, I don't think. No, he saw it in New York. I would say in Black Mountain, maybe – I wouldn't know that.

**MEH:** No, I don't think so in Black Mountain. I mean, the competition there wasn't great.

**LA:** No, I think there were envies. Like Lowinsky, I think, and Cohen. He got along with Cohen very well and Elsa. I mean, they both – he loved them. But there was a bit of a competition between him and Lowinsky and Cohen, so – But Cohen always very loyal to Father, I believe, because he understood him and he knew what he was about. Although he had a lot in common with someone like the Strauses, to him that was also a kind of European past that he had very

little to do with. So I can only say that – I know when he was unhappy in Black Mountain was when it broke up, and all the people who he shared any kind of belief with left.

**MEH:** That was when Bentley left, and Fran de Graaff, and whatever.

**LA:** Yes. Also then when Albers left, of course. But Bentley he got along with very well, and he didn't like this idea that Black Mountain breaks up because some tried to be more politically oriented and others more into the arts. But of course I think Albers just had a much better position offered to him so it was a natural for him to go.

**MEH:** Well, when he left there were political problems also, but very different than when Bentley and that group left.

**LA:** That's right, but I know that he was always –

**MEH:** Albers did not have a position when he left Black Mountain. No. He left, but they had nothing and no position for a year.

**LA:** Well, I think it was that time, though, which was the hardest for Father because he became sort of the arbitrator, the balancer of the two factions, and that made it very difficult because he believed in both sides, in a way. He tried to bring them together, and sort of felt a sense of responsibility because he was put in the middle. He would have liked to quit at that moment, to tell you the truth, but he realized he couldn't. He couldn't have made a livelihood on the outside. You see, in the beginning he was sponsored for five years, like all the new people – what was it? Whitney or some foundation.



**MEH:** I think it was – I'd have to check which one (OVERTALK). There were several. I don't remember which one.

**LA:** Yeah. There was some foundations that he was backed with, and then I think Jamieson also backed it partly. So, there was no problem then. He got the full, they got the full salary. But then when there was no more money, and they became co-owners – they knew that meant nothing. He had a tough time then, because he still liked to go to New York and they really had to save, you know, pennies to get to New York. I could sometimes put them up, but usually I got them a little apartment for the couple of weeks. Well, Father was in seventh heaven. At that time he was working on a book for Dallapiccola who was a famous Italian composer who also ran a publishing house. It was about Schoenberg.

**MEH:** Do you know what happened to that manuscript? (OVERTALK)

**LA:** Well, whatever – if there was anything, it all went to Sacher. Sacher has it all now. The thing that Sacher doesn't have is the Black Mountain stuff, because they were not interested in that. They were only interested.

**MEH:** In the Schoenberg –

**LA:** In the Schoenberg, the whole European era.

**MEH:** It's really just as well that remains in this country.

**LA:** Yeah, that remains here and I still want to know from you what to do with it.

(OVERTALK)

**MEH:** We'll take a look.

**LA:** I have to get it out of the house. I really have to unburden myself. I have so many things. I have Father's, I have my sister's, I have my husband's – so I mean, it's all too much.

**MEH:** That definitely is. So, let's go – I'm going to come back to several things. But Trude was ten years your senior, ten years older.

**LA:** Yes.

**MEH:** So you were really like two separate families in how –

**LA:** Two generations.

**MEH:** Two generations.

**LA:** Two separate families. I was really brought up as a little latecomer baby, and yet my sister was always by everybody included – They were such effetes, you know, these people around us. Everything beautiful counted. Well my sister was the spitting image of my mother – this dark skin with the – my mother as a young woman – black eyes, black hair, and she had something really very beautiful about her in her body and everything. I was a nothing. A little thing, they called, the "knirps," which was "the little thing." I was, you know, blue-eyed, freckled white skin, and I didn't fit into the family. I belonged more to Mother's family. Although she was black-eyed, her family essentially was blue-eyed, so they always said I belonged to that family who was called Groag, means Grey Eyes. True. (UNINTEL) really. They were always laughing about that, but at the same time, as we say, totally brought up quite differently. But I always admired my sister and envied her for certain things and tried to emulate her – could never come near her and, as I say, because I was so nasty sometimes as a

child, they said I was born in April with little horns! (LAUGHS) Sister was the calm and balanced one. So, we were always sort of pitched against each other, although Mother – there's one thing which we both, as we found out as we got older and didn't like. She would dress us alike – same dresses. Now you know what that must have meant to my sister to be dressed like the little one? I mean, it's just impossible. Finally she managed to shed that, but for holidays she had clothes made for us identical. Dreadful! The little lace collars (LAUGHTER).

**MEH:** Were you in touch with Trude during the War? Did you all know what was happening to her?

**LA:** No, we knew nothing about her. Nothing for a couple of years. Only in the very beginning. To tell you the truth, I don't know even if we knew that she was with somebody. I'm not sure. Most of it we found out afterwards. The people who hid her eventually moved here. He became a diplomat at the U.N. and his wife – a very good friend of Trude's – they were actually the same age. They had a son and she was, so to say, the nanny for that son, who is now a fine architect and I believe lives in this country. They were wonderful. I think the Dutch I knew were all the finest people in relationship to refugees. You talked about the Japanese what happened in this country, how we treated them. Trude could have been honored in Holland because her husband was a hero to the Dutch after the War, when it was found out how he was killed. There was a lot of money that was due her, but she gave all that to his family when she came here. She came here on a Visitors' visa – again, because she had a position at Black Mountain

College. Her visa was running out, whatever time she had spent here, and she went to renew it and that was during the McCarthy era. They said she has to go back because her husband was a Communist, which he never was. He was in the underground, but being he was a leader in the underground, they presumed that he must have been a Communist. How else, you know? This was that same fear except it wasn't during the War. It was the McCarthy period. Well they wanted to send her back to Holland, didn't want to renew the visa. So then the college backed her up again.

**MEH:** She was still at the college then?

**LA:** She was still at the college. Made it possible for her to stay. This country was very – had some odd times, I must say, and yet the beauty of this country is that it constantly can renew itself. It can come back from the worst disasters. And a lot can still happen here. I can see it, with all these smaller, radical groups that are on the right wave, on the right. It's dangerous. But, as you say, always people, once they come to the fore, as long as we are not, you know – god knows what happens here, I don't want to even mention it. So I don't think we'll ever have a kind of personality like Hitler who will take over this country.

**MEH:** I think there always – and it's a very scary right-wing that's present in this country – but I think that it will not – god forbid – ever become the dominant force.

**LA:** Yes.

**MEH:** So, Black Mountain really was your salvation for your entire family.

**LA:** Totally. For all of them. Because it did make it possible for us to get a foothold somewhere in a country where there were so many possibilities. It was especially good for the young, like my sister and myself. I mean, the young in comparison with my parents. You see, when I realized what age my parents must have been when they went through all that. Horrendous. They at least did not have that thing where people who had lived all their lives in one home or that had a long tradition of families living in one place where they thought nothing can ever change, at least they didn't have that. They were used to changing places, changing venues. You know. They were used to it. It's just what went with it was difficult. So, when we left, the interesting thing is Mother, of all the things – What they took with them, for example, these masses of letters. What for? What did they think? They were precious to them. They didn't think someday we'll sell them or something. They were so precious to them. Why did people bring mattresses? They thought they wouldn't have a place to sleep. I mean, my parents didn't bring exactly mattresses, but they brought the featherbeds, they brought the linen – never used the linen, you know.

**MEH:** Your parents brought the linen?

**LA:** Yeah, they brought linen. Not mattresses but linen. They brought – What was interesting, when we left Germany, they stored everything in a warehouse in Italy, because we had very good furniture. First I remember in this early apartment it was a kind of modern, like Art Deco is here, you know. It was Art Nouveau, modern furniture. Then when we moved into the outskirts, it became more modern like that – you know, a kind of Bauhaus modern, except they

were good pieces. So, they stored some of this good furniture, you know, these whole bedrooms and whole dining rooms and we had a lot of Biedermeyer –

**MEH:** This is a horrible time [INTERRUPTION FOR TECHNICAL CORRECTION]

**LA:** After Cologne, where we had a very fine place to live, all this furniture and everything, the good pieces were put into storage in Italy near a harbor, it was probably Naples or Genoa, probably. I don't know where. They thought once we're settled somewhere, whether it's Austria, Czechoslovakia, Russia, we'll get it sent. They even left it there when they came to this country. Then after the War, it was all gone – stolen. Nothing left. But what they did bring was totally impractical. A huge Biedermeyer armoire. Now, you know you couldn't put that anywhere. There was no use for it.

**MEH:** Did they have that at Black Mountain?

**LA:** No. It wouldn't have fit in those tiny rooms. It was a beauty. I remember as a child, playing in it – house – you know, going inside. So then I – Then they lent it first to Dr. Kulka. His daughter actually went to Black Mountain. He was a very successful doctor, and lent it to him. When Boris and I moved out here, we tried to get from him, and he either had died already or I never got it. I would have loved that armoire then. We had a lot of Biedermeyer furniture, too. Beautiful stuff. Well, all that went. I remember then, like the linen, never used here. Then – and books. I mean, (LAUGHS) you have no idea the amount of books. German books they brought here. What good were German books here? Manuscripts, yes. Paintings, yes. This – and mountains of correspondence.

They did it, I really think, because they felt precious. That meant something to them. The fur coat and all these –

**MEH:** What about photographs? Did they bring some photographs?

**LA:** Photographs, some, yes. Not too many. It was for Father's fiftieth birthday which was a wonderful one in Cologne, she had made albums of the family. Yes, I still have some, a lot of pictures were taken out and so forth, but I have those. She always made things, you know, and so she did that. I had plenty of photographs and there's still mountains of correspondence which I'll never read, I'm sure, and yet I can't throw them out either.

**MEH:** Is this stuff she brought from Germany?

**LA:** She brought all that from wherever (OVERTALK), I can't remember, wherever we were. But what we took along were always these things, like the armoire (LAUGHS) and those books and the manuscripts and – well, things of that nature. It was amazing, and all that Trude and I had to get rid of after Mother died, although she was wonderful. She had actually put it in order and put little ribbons around each package and put the name on each. I heard about this Sacher Institute and they were fascinated by it. They came here to look at it all. I mean, they were very much interested. And, as I say, I still have the Black Mountain things.

**MEH:** Let's, before we look at those and talk about those, we've talked about Trude, we've talked about your mother, we've talked about your father, now let's talk about you. You were at Black Mountain for one year.

**LA:** One year and a half. More actually. I was there – I came back for the second semester, but I don't think I finished it. No. I don't think I stayed for the whole year. I can't remember when I came to New York exactly.

**MEH:** Did you have people to stay with when you got to New York?

**LA:** At first I stayed with somebody – Mother and Father insisted – on Central Park West, two people that they heard about, and they were very nice. But then pretty soon after that I got a room of my own and then the next year when Jane and Leslie Katz came we shared this duplex down in the Village. Then after that I always had – I would rent a room or a one-room apartment, so to say, every year. I changed it because I worked in fall and winter in New York and summer I would go to a summer theater, so I would give up the place I had, and I lived in the Village for quite a while, and then I actually only moved uptown when I married Boris. He was on Columbus Circle, yeah. That was 1945. But – So, I was in New York alone, basically, from '41 to '45.

**MEH:** And what were you doing?

**LA:** Well, I was working –

**MEH:** These were the war years.

**LA:** In the war years I was very busy then, because I worked for other designers, all well-known designers, as a draftsman and model-maker – a draftsperson. Was in the union, and in fact – it's interesting enough – at that time the union exam held very rarely, only when they felt like it. Then when it came on suddenly, you had to take the exam and it cost five hundred dollars, which was a heck of a lot. I didn't have the money. That wonderful Leslie Katz lent me the money. Now



what that meant to me in terms of somebody believing in me, to the point that they would lend me five hundred dollars, was unbelievable. That egged me on, also, to go further. I paid it back in bits and pieces, but I'll never forget that. It was so generous on his part, at a time when he also was still doing very small things. But he had, I think, money. They were just great friends. Mother and Father didn't have that money to give me. Then, because they were the war years, it was the only time in a way when it was easier for women to get jobs like that, drafting and working for designers, because the men were all away in the army. So, I got really jobs where I learned a lot in each and every one of them – always working in the studios, and got to know a lot of theater people at that time, and went to the theater practically every night, standing room, how else? Of course, at that time you could live for next to nothing in New York.

**MEH:** At that time!

**LA:** At that time. You weren't even born yet. Well, barely born.

**MEH:** I was born.

**LA:** Barely. But you didn't live here yet. (OVERTALK) Then every time John Evarts came to New York, that's when the Black Mountaineers, the New York Black Mountaineers got together – usually around the holidays, Christmas or so. We'd sing all the old songs and we would talk, and it was wonderful.

**MEH:** Who was in that group at that time?

**LA:** Oh, well, I remember – Well, Ati came sometimes. She wasn't around too much. Chuck. Jane and Leslie definitely. John Stix. Jeepers, I don't know. Whoever was in New York at that time. Betty What's-her-name? I can't

remember. I'm terrible on names. Brett. Yeah. Some of John's friends too. It was always very lively. Evening, usually, an evening, that's all.

**MEH:** But going back to your work –

**LA:** Oh, and then I also at that time, by the way, taught at Piscator's (German famous director) at the New School. He had a school and used a theater and I taught costume design there, while I was also working on Broadway with designers, and did a few costumes for him, too – I mean, his shows.

**MEH:** So, when you working on Broadway, at this point, it was basically – you said you were doing models. Was this for stage productions?

**LA:** Drafting. Drawings. Very few times models, until I came to Boris who did a lot more models. These people mostly needed drafting for stage productions.

**MEH:** Who were you – Do you remember some of the people you worked for then?

**LA:** The names? Oh yes. First I started with Harry Horner, who came from Vienna and I knew his name from Vienna. Then I worked with Jo Mielziner for a long time. Stewart Chaney, Norman Bel Geddes, maybe a couple of lesser-known ones. Oliver Smith. All of them. Then I knew an actor and director down at Piscator's by the name of Herbert Berghof, who also then started a school with Uta Hagen. I had worked for him, and he was in a show called The Russian People, which Boris designed. I said, "Oh, you have to introduce me to that designer. I want to work for him. I love his work. I've seen his work – it's very European." I knew nothing about Boris, where he came from or anything. He did introduce me to him. At that time Boris had absolutely no work, so I moonlighted sometimes in the evening, worked with him on projects,

fascinating projects that I worked on. So, the more I worked for him the more he wanted me, and then worked for him also when he had some shows in the daytime. Gave up Mielziner, who was very good because I had learned a lot from him and the designer that everybody designed for, he was called the Dean of Designers and eventually became quite competitive with Boris, or Boris with him. Then, I worked for Boris for at least two years and I always say before he realized he had a woman sitting there working for him! (LAUGHS) Then we finally became more intimate and after three years, or two years, of working with him, we finally got hitched. Because I was very conservative. He wanted me to move in with him. I said, "Oh, no!" (LAUGHS)

**MEH:** That's your mother speaking!

**LA:** Absolutely. I'll tell you Mary, what really gets me – how much I recognize my mother in me, which is responsible for the conflict between us, too. I stopped myself so often, you know, with my son – I mean, he's fifty, but he's still my son. So, constantly I say, "Well, it's their life. Leave them be," you know, because Mother was critical about everything. She was interested in the work Boris and I did, but about our behavior and all this and how we lived. There was so much to criticize. Mother loved to criticize. She was – I would say it wasn't criticism. Pardon me. She was opinionated. It wasn't criticism. It was opinionated. You felt forced almost to listen to her because she was an interesting woman. I know when we had friends of our age or famous people who came to the house, they were fascinated by her. She was fascinating, and I remember at Black Mountain how the kids went for her. I was happy about that for her sake.

It was very good. Then when she left Black Mountain, she wanted to come to New York because we had a child, and Trude didn't. Boris said, "Where's your mother going to live?" He said, "It's not going to work," he said. "Really, it's going to break up our marriage." He was not the kind of person who would have, could have lived with a mother-in-law. So, my wonderful sister and that wonderful husband of hers said, "You come out." She came to California, lived with them, and they realized too: that doesn't work. So Elsesser, her husband, again this marvelous man. She bought a house with the little bit of money she got from Black Mountain and a couple of things she sold, and he built and worked, made a wonderful house for my mother – very near them. He had a solution, a positive solution, for Mother to live by herself but nearby. Mother, I think, was very happy there in that house. It just became a little too much for her at the end – you know how steep those mountains are. She loved all the people there. Of course, she had Ruth and so many from Black Mountain, and she had also musicians, you know, the wife of Schoenberg, Gertrud Kolisch, and one of the Kolisch sisters – that was a quartet of the time of the Schoenberg era. They lived out there, and she had many good friends in the musical world, Mother.

**MEH:** What year did your mother die?

**LA:** Oh god, she died '64 I think. '64 or '5. She was eighty-one. Father died much too young, at Black Mountain.

**MEH:** Were you aware that he had a heart condition?

**LA:** No, because he was – In New York he had seen a doctor who said he was all right. Then it was just like that – a heart attack. I think it went so fast, from what I was told. I went down there immediately, of course, after I was told. I remember we were sitting at home and Clifford Odets, who was a very good friend, was at our house, and the call came in around midnight or something about Father's death. He had been at Black Mountain and even though he did not attend any of the classes, he remembered Father so well. He somehow said the right things to me that appeased me totally. I just felt so awful really that I had not taken advantage even when the last time – He was in New York. He had worked on this Schoenberg book and had gone a lot to the Public Library for research. I remember I once encountered him in the street. He became quite an absent-minded professor in later life. He was really just all-absorbed in his musical world. I encountered him in the street and that was so beautiful. It was my favorite moment with him. I was alone with him. I could walk the streets with him. We could sit down, have a coffee and talk. It was the one intimate moment I had with Father in years, because we were never quite talking together, you know, like one talks with a mother where you pour everything out. He was also jubilant and happy. Of course, as I say, he was easily happy, aroused, and when just a little – it was just the littlest nice thing. I remember he said – I said, "What would you like to drink?" and he said "I'd like a beer," you know (LAUGHS). Suddenly that became like some very lush, you know, a caviar or something! It's the way he said it, you know – a luxury. Beautiful person. Just beautiful.

**MEH:** He was just so much loved at Black Mountain. Adored.

**LA:** I'm sure. He must have.

**MEH:** I always had the sense that much as I think he truly loved Black Mountain, I think from his letters to Ted Dreier after he came – he was in New York for that leave of absence. After he went back, I mean, he saw how unfriendly New York could be in terms of just having all the musicians here and the competition and – Now if you look at his age, you know, he was not employable at that point in his life. Like you say, he was not – I mean, it must have been brutal with everybody needing work at that point. Even though – and when he came back from his letters to Ted despite how disillusioned he had been by the Bentley thing, I think he realized the value of Black Mountain. He realized it wasn't a perfect community, as he had maybe thought before, but he also saw it better. But I always had the sense when he was at Black Mountain, from the beginning, that had an opportunity come for a position in Los Angeles or in New York that he would have been thrilled.

**LA:** Oh, absolutely.

**MEH:** Absolutely thrilled to be in the professional circles again.

**LA:** Oh, yes, he still needed it very badly, really. He needed that. Yes. But, again, I mean, this whole satisfaction of working with untouched material, you know, these young people who had talents that can be not guided or manipulated even, but that can grow, I mean, like a plant. It can either grow the wrong way or it can grow – or you can let it bloom and become something very special. That you had something to do with that, this giving birth to something, was

always inherent in his work, just an idea man. So, I think whatever it was in that moment, he could get satisfaction out of it. But in comparison, when he saw what went on in the music world and he felt left out. There's no doubt, professionally, it must have, as you say, been a terrible blow when he was at the height of his career. That – it just all collapsed, and he must have been about fifty-two or something like that, at the most. Fifty-one or two. I remember it was shortly after that marvelous birthday of his, with a big wonderful party. I think – because life's full of difficulties, you don't realize really until you come to a certain point, like for example my point in life: What were the truly satisfying things? What were the truly meaningful things in life? I've really only been able to rethink all that, like talking to someone like you, because I have always now brushed the past totally aside and I said it – I had that and that and that. I mean, what I have now. I mean, I have a wonderful past in the theater. It's because – I didn't realize it at the time because it was hard labor, difficulty dealing with people – that was the worst part of it. Yet at the same time trying to collaborate, finding the right collaborators and so forth.

**MEH:** Now after your marriage to Boris, did you work solely with him or did you work independently?

**LA:** No, I worked with him totally then. I did a little bit also work on the side with Jo Mielziner but then he realized it doesn't work anymore. No, no, I worked with him, period. I also got so used to his way of working and I was so much a part of that work, where I wasn't just the assistant but I really also worked creatively with him. His work needed a lot of interpretation, and I could interpret some of

his work. I was, again, like Mother a little bit, the practical one where he was the dreamer. So how – where was I? Yes –

**MEH;** It was really a collaboration.

**LA:** It was a collaboration so that after he died, when Hal Prince offered me another job – which I did work for another designer – I couldn't do it anymore. I did it, that one job. I couldn't have gone on doing it. I worked that one job as an assistant to an English designer, and because he had to go back to England, I took over the work that he was supposed to do here. Then he came back again. But he worked so differently from Boris and I was so used to a different kind of working together. I was just not able to do it anymore, and so I really gave it up. I didn't get any satisfaction, and fortunately I didn't need to do it because, at that point in life, Boris had several successful shows and they were still going on and I had enough money to accumulate a little bit. Then when I had this collection of Father's, that was sold to Sacher, and so I could live on that. Boris had a very fine collection – Now, you have to realize another thing in relationship to Black Mountain. You said I had a traditional upbringing in Europe, which is true in terms of education. But Boris grew up on Constructivism in Russia, and he was in that first phase of Constructivists. I was at home with that, you see. I knew that. That is another thing – it appealed to me. You see, I actually went back to what came much easier to me. This was kind of Modernism of a certain period in time, which was always avant garde – you're ahead of your time. That was Constructivism, that was Schoenberg, and that was the Bauhaus, you see. So, in their own media, they all somehow came



from similar thinking and approach to life and work. Our main – wonderful things that we did together like museums or concerts and so, he had similar tastes. We had all that together, and also in the work although he worked basically, in the beginning, very differently but the roots were the same. You can see it in his work. It's quasi-Abstract. Although he started out as almost Impressionist, he went through several phases, but the Constructivism was always there. So, my schooling in Europe was strictly a "schooling," an education in design of how to go, how to draft, how to make a model, how to light a show, and so forth, and not so much in design as such: how to research for a show. I mean, so I learned the basics from that traditional education. But working with American designers was an adaptation for me. Very different. But nevertheless I got a lot out of it, because technically I learned a lot from the Americans because their theater techniques were very different. In Europe the theaters have all their machinery built into them and you fit yourself into the existing houses. Here you bring your machinery and your lighting instruments and everything. For each show you bring it with you and put it in to an empty house. So in one way, you know, in Europe you adapt yourself to existing conditions, and you have theater staff and painters who are connected to your work. They're always the same ones, and here it's a competitive thing always. You never know where you're going to wind up. So it was a different approach that I had to relearn. I learned that from the American designers – not from Boris, because he wasn't into technical things at all. He was strictly worked on the artistic level (LAUGHS), which was the European approach. You had a

designer who worked on the artistic level and then you had staff people who figured out how to do it. But, as I say, no matter what, I have to go back to Black Mountain. Even though the work of Albers, of his teaching, was not related to theater, it was. It's the creation of illusion, you know. The creation of space, of what makes something spatial to, you know – Or dimensions, what they do to each other. All that I learned from him, basically. And construction. I think that – I wish I had taken Molly Gregory's group, because that was really working with your hands. Again – hands on kind of a thing. [DISCUSSION OF PAPERS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

**[END OF SIDE 2, AUDIOCASSETTE 2; SIDE 1, AUDIOCASSETTE 2 BEGINS]**

**LA:** – about my career.

**MEH:** We were talking about your career. So your relationship to Boris was – well it wasn't like your relationship with your mother to your father because your mother really was – You were working on more of a professional level with Boris.

**LA:** I was, yeah, and Mother was sort of the sounding board for Father and at the same time also the social mixer, a little bit, and all that.

**MEH:** But you went back frequently to visit Black Mountain to visit your mother.

**LA:** I did every year, at least once a year, sometimes more. That was interesting to me because – not only because I got to know again some more of the new faculty, and they were always interesting. Then also a lot of students, some still hangovers from before and some new ones. But mostly I think I met some of the new faculty and went to some of the lectures and stayed not very long. We

stayed about a week or two, something like that, with Mother in that cottage of hers which was lovely. She still kept it exactly the way it was originally with Father there. She had a little garden, and she had the teas in the afternoon, where students and teachers were invited, and the nice thing was that she sort of did her thing and let me be in on it. It wasn't around me, but it was her usual activities, and I liked that and learned something from that (LAUGHS) in relationship to my (INAUDIBLE WORD). It was in a way a continuation because some of the people were still the same and the faculty, and then the new or more interesting ones came and Bucky Fuller. I visited some of these happenings. Then went – even when Bucky Fuller was back in New York for some of his lectures at Cooper Union, I was absolutely fascinated by that man. The music, I didn't participate in anything except chorus at that time and I don't remember any special concerts or anything. But it was walking a lot. Lore was very friendly with Mother and the Dehns. They were big walkers and so we would always go on walks. Mother knew all the names of the flowers and the mushrooms, just like Lore and Peter now. This is what I find so nice, that Lore and Peter sort of have a kind of tradition. She hasn't changed much at all in terms of her lifestyle of what she got from Black Mountain. I mean, it's their own now, and their lives, but again I think that sort of the ethics and the whole attitude towards art is very strong with her from that period. That's what I relish when I'm with them. These little walks in Vermont, I just adore that. Also the things they collect and the shows that they go to, and now her work I'm absolutely fascinated by. Because I see the growth in her and how she in a way

establishing her own language in pictures. It's her life, sort of a combination of handicraft and pictures which is really wonderful. So I'm happy to have them. They are really sort of my closest friends in terms of my relationship to the past and the present, and I love their children, Naomi, in particular. I've really only gotten close to them since I am without Boris because before that we were really so involved in work that there was very little time to keep up old friendships. I keep it up – Well, of course, John is my neighbor, and we have a lot in common in (UNINTELL) work with theater and so forth, and friends. What were we talking about before?

**MEH:** So your friendships at Black Mountain really have been your lifelong friendships.

**LA:** Totally, and they've intensified since I'm alone. I mean, I see more of the need for it and the meaning when you're alone. You want to go back to something where you felt very reassured in your beliefs. Ati and Jane, I mean, different directions but still I feel very close to them, and even if we don't see each other that much, all of us. But to stay in touch. So, I really like that. What can I say? I'm very happy, particularly with the work that you are doing because you researched it beautifully. You wrote about it in a way that I cannot believe that you never were there because you know ten times more already about it than any of us do. Yet you have brought out, I think, what makes it so special, which of course you did in terms of the whole interest that awoke again in Black Mountain. Wherever I turn now, people know what Black Mountain was. It was interesting for me to see down there how it switched in terms of the emphasis,

which actually was in the end away from the arts and more into literature,  
wasn't it?

**MEH:** I was going to ask – one question I was going to ask you, because you were a person who saw it really over a period of fifteen years. But in a sense you were detached.

**LA:** I was totally detached.

**MEH:** In that you didn't have a commitment to any particular clique or whatever.

**LA:** No, not at all.

**MEH:** It switched to literature in the later years, but, I mean, literature is really a form of the arts.

**LA:** Literature. Yes, of course.

**MEH:** How did it, in your perception, how did it change through the years?

**LA:** Very hard to say. It changed every year, really. It had a lot to do with the type of students that came in, and also the ever-changing faculty. Like when Boris and I went down there, that was when Rauschenberg and Twombly were there. At that time they were just starting to do their own thing. Rauschenberg was putting newspapers, pasting them on and then painting them all white or all black, made these huge canvases. Of course, it was already influenced by something that he had seen, but nevertheless you knew that guy's going to do something. Twombly, to my eye, even more. And so did this guy never quite made it – Reese – was that his name? Rice. Reese. Rice.

**MEH:** Dan Rice?

**LA:** Dan Rice, whose work I liked very much but he never quite came up to that acceptance or fame or whatever. I don't know why, whether it was his personality that kept him back, or his work. I wasn't familiar with his later work. But I was particularly taken at that time with Ruth Asawa's work, who actually I only got to know down at Lake Eden. She I don't think was up at Lee Hall, at all. What's her name was interesting, the photographer.

**MEH:** Hazel Archer?

**LA:** Hazel. Yeah. Interesting to me that they became the big personalities in Black Mountain. That was also quite a switch, because after Albers left, there was – I think for a while there was sort of a gap in the art world in terms of leadership. So, these two women I think were the big influences at that time, if I'm correct – I don't know.

**MEH:** Hazel was – Ruth had left.

**LA:** Already?

**MEH:** Yeah. She left when Albers left. But Hazel remained and taught photography.

**LA:** Hazel remained. Well why did I think she – Well, maybe not. But then I remember there weren't any really big art teachers there at that time. Was Bolotowsky there?

**MEH:** No, no, he had left – Joe Fiore and Pete Jennerjahn were teaching then.

**LA:** I know. That's it, yes. I remember them. But that was certainly not the same. So it may have been already early on that the emphasis switched a little bit. There was a lot of emphasis on theater at that time. That was probably through the summer – what did they call them? seminars, or festivals, with Cunningham,

you know, and Cage. Then you had this Cernovich, the lighting man, and you had Penn, Arthur Penn. So, there was – suddenly there was a theater group there which hadn't existed before, and interesting theater. Dance, much more than before. There was interest in ceramics, which I never saw during my time. So, there were already different influences in the arts. There wasn't this god at the head of it that Albers was. I think already during these summer things, it brought in a new tone. I think de Kooning was there too, wasn't he? Well, that was still at my sister's time, actually. They knew each other, yeah. Then, and then later years I remember writers coming in more into the picture. I knew them much less. The only thing I admired very much at that time is what they were printing – their graphics. That was fascinating to me. That was much better than at our time. Ours was still relatively conservative. But all the graphics, those invitations and those poems and things, they were fascinating and very special. They introduced something new, a new skill, and I don't know who headed that department. Was it photography too? No, that was earlier.

**MEH:** The graphics, it had to do with a lot of people, but Olson was a big person behind that and Jonathan Will –

**LA:** Oh, Olson even?

**MEH:** Well he was very encouraging – he and M.C. Richards both – in encouraging students to print their own work.

**LA:** Right. That's right.

**MEH:** And then Jonathan Williams coming down and he started Jargon, which was a small press there [MEH: Actually, he had started it earlier.] Then I think it was

just a different time. People were much more creative and innovative in what they were doing with printing.

**LA:** It's true.

**MEH:** It was a different mentality than before.

**LA:** It's true. And that to me was fascinating. To me that was new. There was another, an artist that was earlier, was actually – Lore knows him. He also I think committed suicide. Did things with graphics. He became very well known later. Yeah, he did so to say collages and things with different graphics.

**MEH:** Oh, Ray Johnson.

**LA:** That's it. Ray Johnson.

**MEH:** I think he was an extraordinary artist.

**LA:** Extra-ordinary.

**MEH:** I love his work.

**LA:** And he came, I remember, to our house. He actually wanted to do theater things. So did Rauschenberg. I remember at the beginning in New York, Boris got to know Rauschenberg and those people when he went to this bar that they went to on Eighth Avenue. He asked Boris about doing theater work, how he could get in, and he said right away ballet and things. But then he did these outstanding things at the Armory. I don't know if you remember that in New York. That was before your time. He and Cage did wonderful things. But in the beginning of course he worked together with his wife in New York and did window displays essentially – did wonderful things with blueprints. We all thought "Well he's a wonderful decorator. He'll be a decorator." A little of that he



still had, but he always had something outrageous in him and that was always fascinating. I remember the exhibition at Betty Parsons, when he had the first one. He showed framed pieces of earth with grass growing in them, which had to be constantly watered? I mean, they couldn't have lasted more than five minutes. But fascinating idea, you know – see the grass right in front of you in a picture frame? So he did these things, but essentially we always thought, "Well that's more decorating than art." He just went on and on and further and further, whatever he did. I remember at that time he wasn't so pro-Albers although he was really post-Albers, wasn't he?

**MEH:** He was there when Albers was there, but it wasn't a totally congenial relationship.

**LA:** No it wasn't (OVERTALK). I remember him talking about it.

**MEH:** If you look at the two personalities –

**LA:** Yeah, I remember that. Talking about it. So all these things were always interesting in Black Mountain. There was always something new, every year. But as I say the last thing that impressed me were those graphics. I didn't understand the writing. To me, I know very little about the art of literature and writing so I can't judge it. I also was interested in Olson's lectures, but it didn't fascinate me as much as some of the people who were there. So, I was more aware when I visited of their lifestyle, which had changed so totally. But interestingly, I always saw Mother still participating and being with it.

**MEH:** If you go back to what you were talking about, her being so concerned about form and manners, obviously she had done a tremendous amount of adapting to American culture.

**LA:** Totally. Totally. In the end, I have no idea what she thought of it, really. You know, the very end. But as far as the student body and the students and – As you say, she was a mother figure to a lot of them, and also the acceptance of homosexuality and all that. She accepted all that, which you had to when you were there. My parents have always lived in this kind of world. If you work in the music or theater world, why not? That's part of it. It's always people who are slightly on the outside, you know (LAUGHS) who are, either rabble rousers or not fitting into things. Those are very often the most interesting people and a lot of them found their way to Black Mountain.

**MEH:** You know, everyone who came to Black Mountain – no one just went there like you would go to a normal university. Everyone who went went for a reason, usually it was because they were not happy with the status quo. They selected themselves.

**LA:** Exactly.

**MEH;** I hear over and over again people who were misfits in the rest of the world, but when they got to Black Mountain, they really felt at home.

**LA:** Felt at home, right. Ati has to tell you her story how she also had that same thing. She's a very interesting person, really is, her whole past and present, and so capable. Unbelievable. I don't know what else to say.

**MEH:** Looking back on Black Mountain, I guess this is maybe sort of a dumb question to ask you when you realize what this meant to your family. I could ask you what the importance of Black Mountain you really feel is as an institution but I doubt if you can really separate that from your own experience or your family's experience.

**LA:** Yeah. Well I honestly – you mean what it meant to them?

**MEH:** What it meant to them but also sort of in a broader context of having been in the art world – What really do you think the importance of Black Mountain was in a more general sense?

**LA:** The very fact that it existed, that it could exist, that it was a breeding ground for the best and the worst, and had this kind of freedom that at that time you couldn't find anywhere in the world, I'm sure. As I say, it was probably a precursor of the sixties, already a kind of buildup towards it, where, you know, you broke all barriers and anything was possible, and where students revolted against the teachers and all that. It sort of half existed in Black Mountain already. I'm more interested why did it fall apart, why couldn't it go on? Well, I imagine mostly because it didn't have the money. But I think it is also partly because it lost its foundation, its basic thinking. I don't know if it ever had a motto in terms of how it was founded. But it certainly always sort of went against everything that was typical for any kind of education. Wasn't it? Or institution, certainly.

**MEH:** Definitely.

**LA:** Something very private, in a way, and only for – I mean, you couldn't recreate it today. Impossible. The time was right. It did reflect every generation, except that it was always slightly ahead of its time. It was unusual, I think, the direction it took. Maybe if Rice would have been there. Maybe if none of the refugees had been there, it would have been quite different. I believe the Europeans, like in this whole country, influenced Black Mountain College a great deal. They did it in all the arts in this country.

**MEH:** There's no question. Bringing Albers to the college at the first totally altered the history and influence of the college.

**LA:** Exactly.

**MEH:** And then the total refugee presence totally changed the direction and the purpose of the college.

**LA:** Yeah. Right. I think it's surely so. But they are responsible. They picked them, you now.

**MEH:** When other schools closed their doors.

**LA:** Might never have done it, would have shied away, because even the other later ones, like I don't know what other? Oberlin and places like that? I think were patterned after Black Mountain or were, in a way, not influenced so much by the Europeans. Were they? I don't know.

**MEH:** They weren't. But they existed on their own terms – very different terms. But they didn't have the refugee presence that Black Mountain had totally.

**LA:** Right. Well, I think America would have sort of developed on its own too, except it would have taken much longer. Like I know only what happened in stage

design. I mean, when I came here or even Boris came here in the twenties, the American stage design was so behind the times in terms of what you could do. Same in painting. Same in sculpture. It was really only after the Second World War – after Europe opened up – that America found its own tongue, its own language in the arts. Where they realized we don't have it yet. We have to go further. Of course, it's always related to the conditions around you and the economy in many ways. But I think in Black Mountain it was the refugees that changed it first. Then it was the Americans like Olson and like Cunningham, and, oh, some of the Americans who went there, I think, who changed it again. Bucky Fuller. I mean, totally different from Albers. Quite different – introducing structure, architecture, in a totally different way. It was fabulous for Black Mountain. He was an outcast in this country too. Then even this man who came from Kaiser. What was his name? The Hansgirgs. Fascinating people, actually. There were Americans too who were very very interesting. But it was this whole group, this whole mixture, which is how it goes here. Yeah, and then the students changed over the years, the types of students that went there. Some with very few skills, I think. In the beginning they were more demanding, Black Mountain, as to what you had to bring there in terms of abilities. Then they had a faculty, I don't know, and admissions committee. I wasn't a part of any of that, so – The good thing was, as you well know, was that students were part of the choosing people, making decisions – very democratic, very good. (LAUGHS). I was always puzzled though that they related relatively little to the world around them, that they managed to stay so isolated and actually were only recognized

in later, much, much later years after they closed. Before that, I imagine people would rather not know about them (LAUGHS). I don't know.

**MEH:** Well, I think that also it was such a small place. There were people who knew, but this was not something that Middle America was interested in. Actually, it's not something that Middle America will ever be interested in. So it took a while for – after it closed – to – I think that was part of its importance and its success was the fact that it was not. It was such an intense and isolated community, and the people who were – If it had been an enormous place, it would have been a very different place. But because it was so small, I mean, it wasn't commanding a lot of attention in those circles. It was not seen as significant.

**LA:** In New York circles, yes, they knew about it and maybe out in California.

**MEH:** In New England, you know, because of all the New Englanders there. So – Also the importance of what happened there – I mean, when these people like Rauschenberg and Twombly were there, and even de Kooning. Bucky Fuller was at a very low point in his career at that point. These people were not – it was not like they were great artists who were at Black Mountain. They were people – The impact would only be known after this seed that was sprouted there, as M.C. Richards would say, had blossomed.

**LA:** Yes. that's absolutely true, because even some like, like those people that you mentioned, who also were not used to go to a little college somewhere way out and trying their experiments and everything. They were meant probably to do all that in larger places. But, like Bucky Fuller, who got his recognition only later. So, it was a breeding ground. It was the seed that was planted. Very true. She's

right, M.C. was right. Well, she actually was ceramics first, wasn't she? Or did she always write?

**MEH:** She came there as a traditional academic.

**LA:** Oh, I see.

**MEH:** You know, with a Ph.D., from the University of Chicago [MEH: Ph.D. possibly not from University of Chicago]. Then she got caught in this whole creative thing, and so she did both writing and ceramics. In her later years, she painted, because she died a year ago – this past fall, actually.

**LA:** I know. I read about it.

**MEH:** Okay, why don't we –

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**