

Interviewee: VERA BAKER WILLIAMS
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. Vera, how did you hear about Black Mountain
College?

VW: Can I interrupt you about the squeaking of the chair, because you could get
another chair from the other studio. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: Vera, I was asking you how you heard about Black Mountain College.

VW: Yeah. Well, of course this is a very long time ago, Mary, so I hope this isn't
apocryphal [LAUGHS]. I heard about it in an odd way. I may have known about
it anyway. I went to Music and Art High School, so I think it's possible that I
knew about it. But I belonged to a Great Books reading group. The brother of a
good friend of mine in high school was a tutor at St. John's in Annapolis, and I
was very interested in that kind of education, and I wanted to go to St. John's.
They wouldn't take me because they didn't take women – girls, we would have
said. They didn't take girls. All my efforts to convince them didn't work. But, they
said, "Why don't you go to Black Mountain College?" There was a professor
named Straus, Trudy Straus's husband – I think Otto was his name.

MEH: Erwin.

VW: Erwin. Erwin, that's right. Erwin Straus, who was teaching at St. John's. He may
have gone back and forth for awhile, though. The times I was at Black Mountain

I don't remember seeing him. But they said, "You could go to Black Mountain because you can follow whatever curriculum you want there. You could follow the St. John's curriculum." I think that was a big reason why I went. I also was very intrigued with the fact that it was in the country, that it had a farm. I had had a longing to live in the country.

MEH: Did you go down to visit before you actually enrolled?

VW: No. That would have been impossible money-wise. But somebody interviewed me in New York. I have no memory of who it is, and that just comes back to me now.

MEH: You had said that you [INTERRUPTION, TECHNICAL ADJUSTMENT]. You had said that you graduated from the High School of Music and Art in 1944, I believe – in the spring.

VW: Yeah.

MEH: But you didn't go directly to college.

VW: No. I didn't have enough money. As a – as spending money and train fare money and all. I had the money to pay the tuition, which I was given the lowest tuition, because that was paid by the Educational Foundation for Jewish Girls, whom I recently heard from, actually. They were checking up on all their people they had helped. They had helped my sister to go to college, they had helped my mother to go to nursery school – I'm sorry, to nursing school, and they helped me. But I needed money for travel and for spending money so I worked that summer and that fall.

MEH: You grew up in the Bronx in Manhattan?

VW: I grew up all over the place. I was born in California, lived there till I was five or six. Then we bopped all around Brooklyn, Rockaway, the Bronx – many addresses in the Bronx – and then when I went to high school, both my sister and I went to Music and Art. So the long trip and the fare induced my mother to move – my parents to move us to the west side of Manhattan, right near the high school so we could walk to school.

MEH: What did your parents do?

VW: Whatever they could. You know, I was raised – I was born in 1927 so I was raised right through the Depression. My father was trained to be an accountant – not a CPA but an accountant, but he did not hold any kind of steady job. My mother tried a lot of things. They both worked for the unions, when they met. My mother had a hat store at one point. My father helped his friend who had an egg route. My mother collected seaman's pay when they came off the boats for the Maritime Union. Then she went to nursing school during the Second World War. But it wasn't until the Second World War that they had steady employment. Then they became cottage parents in a home for – in the Hawthorne Cedar Knolls School for Delinquent Children.

MEH: So you had – You went to the – [INTERRUPTION]. So you went – How did you come to study at the High School of Music and Art?

VW: I was an art student all my life, actually. I went to a special art school run by Mrs. Florence Kane [SP], who was a painter and a part of the Stieglitz circle. She was an innovator of art education, and she took on my sister and myself, and we went every Saturday for many years. Many years. Then you could take

a test at the end of elementary school to go to this new school that had been founded by Fiorello LaGuardia for music and art students. So I took the test. My sister was already a student there. Because we had both always done art, and we also had studied art, we had done a lot of art, at the Bronx House – Settlement House. So we were very – I think this is important, and when I spoke, my little talk at the, at the reunion in San Francisco, I did try to connect how I had really grown up in a much more communal environment and culture within the community than most people in the United States get to do, I think. You know. So in a sense, when I read about Black Mountain, it was familiar to me. My parents were – I suppose you would call them bohemians. Neither of them were artists, but they loved art, they wanted us to be artists, they had provided us with as much exposure as they could, you know, being very limited in resources. They had been interested in progressive education all their lives, all their adult lives. They were radical. So it was all, you know, part of what I – It was kind of part of a belief system, and I recognized it. I mean, it was odd that I was so interested in St. John's, in a way. But actually in my heart of hearts the kind of life at Black Mountain was very appealing to me when I first read about it.

MEH: Did you – [INTERRUPTION] So, what did you do between high school graduation and January when you went to Black Mountain to earn some money?

VW: I believe I was a counselor in camp in the summer. Pretty sure of that. Yeah. Then I got a job in Schrafft's as a waitress. Yeah. So I worked as a waitress.

Saved my tips. Took them to the – We then had something called Postal Savings. You could have a savings account in the post office, and I got all these certificates and put them in a box and loved counting them. Yeah, that's what I did. Just earned money.

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

VW: I believe I took the train. I could have taken the bus because I did both, but I believe I arrived the first time on the train. I remember being met at the train.

MEH: Was this your first trip to the South?

VW: Yes. Yeah. We hadn't – We had traveled as a family from California to New York. Besides that, we had gone to the country in the environs of New York. We had gone to camp, settlement house camp and to visit people, and my father liked the country a lot. But we hadn't traveled much. I had been to Philadelphia, maybe to Washington.

MEH: Do you remember your first impression of the college?

VW: I do remember the wintry aspect. Can't remember who met me. No, I'd have to say no. I can remember myself on the station, but no, I'd have to say no.

MEH: So, you were really interested in studying art?

VW: No. I wasn't actually. In fact my teacher, Mrs. Kane, was opposed to my going there. She had also been opposed to my going to Music and Art. She was interested in very free art, freeing art education, and that was the great thing she had introduced into childhood art education which had used to be extremely controlled and narrow. She felt that both Music and Art and Black Mountain were going to be too, not – certainly Black Mountain wouldn't be

traditional, but she felt it was too, what would you call it? Constructivist and Modernist – Rational. Too rational.

MEH: Was she familiar with Albers and his teaching?

VW: Yes. Yes. She was a very broadly – a woman out in the world of painting and culture. She didn't understand what a remarkable educator Albers was, and she didn't understand that he did not educate people to paint paintings like his paintings. She may have been somewhat – no, just thinking of art education as something she had developed and didn't understand the way these other things fit in, because it was really a very freeing art education at Black Mountain. But I was not planning to study art. I was interested in philosophy and history and, you know, big glorious topics among which I considered art but not so much as a practitioner. But I wasn't there very long before all of that changed.

MEH: Do you remember the first classes that you took?

VW: No, I don't. I remember being very excited by the discussions in Lowinsky's class, and I believe I took a course in the Old Testament.

MEH: What was Lowinsky teaching?

VW: Well, he was basically there – he was a music professor, but he taught a course in the Bible upon discovering – after Alfred Kazin taught Moby Dick, they discovered that we all were abysmally ignorant of the Bible, and since he had been, you know, classically educated – Lowinsky – and then particularly educated as a – probably as a Jewish scholar, he was very familiar with it and could teach it. So, he had this class, and I took it. I remember writing a long paper on Mosaic Law, the first five books. I remember that class very well. I

liked it. I don't remember – Well, I took drawing. I think I took weaving – maybe not initially, but I know I did weave. I don't specifically remember the first courses I took. They would be in the record probably, but I don't remember.

MEH: What was Lowinsky like as a teacher? How do you remember Edward Lowinsky?

VW: I remember him as a combination of charismatic and satiric, and dismissive of female ways. Brilliant. He liked me because I was articulate and from a very urban articulate Jewish – not religious Jewish, but Jewish – literate background. So, I think, you know, there was a connection there. I was very drawn to learning about this. I was drawn to their family. They had a little Naomi then, and I loved little children. I used to help out with little Naomi. I liked his wife. I was very happy to see them at the reunion at Black Mountain.

MEH: Were you – Did you take any classes with Max Dehn?

VW: Yes, I took philosophy. I liked Dehn very much. We hit it off very well. Dehn and Jagna Braunthal, who was German, and Lore Kadden, now Lore Kadden Lindenfeld, and I kind of all hit it off. Jagna and I and Dehn – I don't remember about Lore – but some part of us used to go hiking, and I learned to collect mushrooms a little bit from Dehn. But I liked Dehn very much, and Dehn and Mrs. – Toni Dehn, who was not there then but she was there when I subsequently was married there. They signed my license and she made a little breakfast for me – I liked them very much. I also took Greek. See, this was all part of why I had come, in a way, but that kind of faded out. But I was the only Greek student, I believe. No, maybe, maybe Lore, maybe Jagna – I don't know.

I think maybe I was the only student who took Greek and Dehn thought I spoke Greek with a – I pronounced Greek with a Bronx accent. But that didn't last long. I think that that whole effort on my part was a little bit forced.

MEH: That was your expectation when you went was that you were going to pursue this Great Books –

VW: Yeah, and my friends from high school – my best friend from high school, went to I think Bennington and pursued a classical education. There were a group of us who were very, very involved in that. We had gone to the Great Books group that our friend's brother did – arranged for us.

MEH: What was Max Dehn like? How do you remember him?

VW: He was just immensely likeable, I thought. Full of odd knowledge and inclined to, you know, go up and down the road with his hands behind his back, muttering, and not very good at taking care of himself. So I think Lore and various of us chipped, you know, kind of joined in to do that. He was pretty elderly then, I think, you know. He must have been my age then. I'm not sure. Do you know? He must have been in his seventies.

MEH: I'm not sure.

VW: He was very interesting. He told me once that the loss of his whole library, how freeing that was. He was very philosophical in nature, I would say.

MEH: Do you think at that time you really were aware at all of how eminent these refugees were in terms of their professional accomplishments?

VW: Of some of them. I believe Jalowetz, Albers – But I would say on the whole, no. I mean, no, I wouldn't have understood that. I don't think. You know, I'm trying to remember. This is -- this is so long ago.

MEH: When you went there, the War was still on.

VW: Yes. It was very small. There were only – there were barely fifty of us.

MEH: Do you think that – Were you really aware of the plight of these refugees? Of why they had to leave Europe, or how serious the situation was? Or do you think that knowledge came later?

VW: No, I was certainly aware that there were – I mean I do come from a Jewish family, and also from a radical family, so they knew – we knew for a long time what was, what was happening. Students came to our high school from families who had lost everything. But I would still say I was not completely aware of the extent of it. There was a peculiar way – I don't know exactly how to put this – in which the group there – who were mostly Jewish, Albers wasn't but Anni was – except for Lowinsky, there was no sense of that. Lowinsky, I remember, had Passover, to which I went. But there was not a sense of beleaguered Jews there that came to me. Later on, when Paul Leser came – I think that's his name – we had a little more idea. He was not Jewish, actually, I don't think. But we had more idea of what he, of what he had gone through in being against the Nazis, somewhat. I don't think we did have much sense of that. I think it would have been better if we had.

MEH: What was Albers like as a teacher?

VW: You probably ask everybody that over and over, right? I wonder if you get a consistent – No? He was a very exciting teacher. He was an attractive- looking man. He always came with his mostly white shirts and they were buttoned up to the top. You know, he was esthetic from his head to his toes, and Black Mountain was too. It was what you might think of as an aesthetic dictatorship [LAUGHS] in its way, which was fascinating. I know it struck everybody as quite odd that I painted my studio gray-green, not white, and had pillows in bright hues – not magenta and black. Magenta, black, white, and Breuer blue were in the ascendant when I came, but I had a different idea about color – which I may have lost for awhile there. He was a very exciting teacher. He was very much in control of the situation. It was like going to the theater. We were all very – always very excited, I think, going to these classes, and even, you know, it generated enthusiasm after the classes and through the week. I was very impressed by him and wanted to please and wanted to do what was being taught. He also was somewhat scornful. He certainly had no idea that teaching involved the kind of careful care for people's psyches that has come to be the case. I mean, in his, in his own view of it he did. He knocked himself out to help this young Polish student who was really lo – not lost. She was wild. I forget her name, but she was a Jewish refugee from Poland, from a wealthy family, I think, and just did not know what she was doing. She could not get organized, and he had the idea that if she would learn to work in a disciplined way outdoors this would help, and he dug a little garden with her though he had so much to do. But I remember them working on the garden. So, he certainly had

ideas about students. He had favorites. I remember him – there was a young man – I forget his name – who could not draw very well and didn't put a great earnestness into it or something. Everything looked – I think Albers said everything looked like a pile of hay. We had a model once, a nice young woman, and Albers embarrassed this student enormously by having him come up and pat her, you know. "See," you know, "you have to enjoy the form and the skin and all, like this," you know. He could be quite impossible. But we loved those classes. He would sit down next to you. He would take your pencil, cross something out. He would write "No No No." He would do all kinds of things that other people think now are really invasive, and some students then didn't like, you know. But I liked those courses very much.

MEH: You took – Why don't we start with the Color course.

VW: I took Color.

MEH: What do you remember about it, in terms of how he conducted the class and the sort of things that you did?

VW: Yeah, well we had this room full of coated color sheets that were available to us. I don't know where he got them, but we had lots of them. Those are really expensive now to get. We had lots of them. We had access to those. We made color studies, which was very exciting to do. You did them in your study, but that year I had my own study. Eventually we kind of had to share studies when it got quite crowded. I had my own study. Or I think we had to share studies. I don't actually remember sharing one. But – Then – See, we would bring our work and we would put it out. He had this way of coming slightly late, after we were

all gathered. He certainly was not a person who was entrapped in any inability to know what time it was, but I think this was dramatic, you know. Then he would come in and he would look at the things and we'd start to talk about them. He would, you know – he would just bring out what was in them and he was wonderful like that. I remember the design course more than the color course.

MEH: What about the Design course do you remember?

VW: Oh, I just remember us going crazy, you know, collecting things and making incredible combinations of things you would never have thought of. I made something from a beautiful kind of a natural colored pongee silk, and dandelion puffs, which I gathered. I can't remember what else was in it, but I just thought it was elegant and marvelous. [LAUGHS] I made something with crystals from the chemistry – from Hansgirg's laboratory, which – well, they looked like candies. I nested them in shredded silk stockings, and Albers was about to put one in his mouth, or pretended he was. Everybody yelled "No, no, no!" He kept saying "They look like candy. They're candy." No, and people just made marvelous things, and we were always running around and going, you know, through the dump and through the kitchen refuse and everything. I made a bone-mobile, not for class, but as a result of having this great appreciation [LAUGHS] for all kinds of trash. I made it for a – I made it with Willie Joseph. We were on the Entertainment Committee, and we made it to decorate the Dining Room for a party. They were very exciting classes. You concentrated

very hard in the drawing and painting classes. No, I don't remem- – I took all four cl- – I took everything he offered, but I don't suppose I took it all at once.

MEH: People have criticized Albers classes, some of the people who wanted to be painters, real artists, and said that these were just exercises but that this sort of education really didn't lead anywhere, that it just led to adults who continued to do exercises. Do you agree with that?

VW: No, I don't agree with that. When I – Or I don't agree with it in my case, and I'll tell you why. When I did my book "More. More. More" Said the Baby, which is in a way a very free book, but it is within a kind of color structure in which I called on everything I had learned as a color student and hadn't even quite realized I had learned. But I had had all those years when I was not only led to but encouraged to just paint and draw and have access to my imagination. I was taught by this Florence Kane, who believed that you were not left just to the gods and the muses whether you could get into your own imagination. She taught you how to do it. So I was really kind of ripe for this more structured approach. Now it was structured, but it was very imaginative in lots of ways. I mean, you took all this material. Nobody told you how to put it together. Nobody told you where to find it either. Now there was also the structural aspect in the Design class, but that too – and I'm not very good at structure – but I remember being set this problem of how to attach the envelope that held the stamps to the blocks that the person who dealt with the mailman who delivered the mail handled. There was a box. It had to have change, it had to have stamps, so you could do everybody's business with the mailman without going to the post

office. The envelope kept coming off, because it had to be glued to the back of the box with tape and as you put your hand into it, you were pulling on it – so that this little problem had to do with the statics or the architecture of attaching this envelope. Well, that was very, a very interesting thing to think about – structure, you know. Folding paper, you got to think about that. As I say, that was not my strong point, and I would say certainly any architect who had that training, or furniture designer, anybody who dealt with materials, it certainly would not have narrowed them. It would have widened them. [INTERRUPTION] I also think that that quality that I've referred to as an aesthetic dictatorship – and that may have bothered the painting – people who were really embarked on wanting to be painters. I think it was very valuable because it introduced you to the idea of the role and the way in which art is part of life and dinner and gardening and road-making and painting walls and lighting and everything. So that doesn't seem narrowing to me. I'm trying to think of the way in which it might be. Well, the painting class I think was perhaps the most limited, and I had certainly never learned to paint that way.

MEH: You were doing watercolor?

VW: We did watercolor, and we did it in a very specific fashion. We just placed colors in enough spots to make forms. No, I never took any other – Other than the painting I took all through my childhood, you know, which was really purposeless, simply to provide you with the opportunity to paint and encourage you to be freely using your imagination, I had had very – Oh, in Music and Art we had much more formal training. We did those kind of things you do in an art

course. We did volumes and with charcoal and all of this kind of thing. We studied art history. We did life drawing, we did – We also used more media. We took graphic arts and did etchings, and you didn't get to do any of that at Black Mountain. So in that way, it was limited.

MEH: But he really intended this as an education for beginners, not as a complete education. I think that people really needed then to go to a school where they could do other things. If they wanted to study painting with oil, you know, and draw on – His idea was that you drew on these basics. Or if you wanted to study printmaking or whatever.

VW: Yeah.

MEH: It definitely was a limited curriculum.

VW: But also if you, say if you had been an art student who wanted to graduate, then you began to paint on your own and he would come to your study and look at your work. But even then he was more interested in these more controlled studies.

MEH: What about the drawing?

VW: The drawing course was marvelous. I think it was probably exceptionally good. There aren't very many good drawing teachers. I mean, he really did teach you to draw.

MEH: And how did he do that?

VW: Well, we had a model. Most of the time, just one of us in our underwear. He did – I'm sure you've heard this story many times about the model? Did you hear about the model he got from town? You never heard that story? That was

wonderful. He finally decided we should have a nude model, and he put an ad in the Asheville paper or something. Then a young woman came, and he made a little place for her to undress and all, we were all there. After awhile we were all sitting there and she didn't come out. He said, you know, where was she? She was still in her slip. It turned out she didn't understand that she was supposed to get naked in front of a mixed group. So, the boys all had to leave for us to draw her nude. I'm sure the "scandale" of that must have gone all through Asheville. But mostly we drew each other, and we drew a lot. Sometimes we drew – we got each other together outside of class and drew. We covered the whole sheet of paper. We did not – He was very against making art. He was against making art – they may have been what bothered people, you know. He would make snide comments about, sharp comments about that, you know – taking you down a peg. So, you were encouraged to – When we put up the drawing shows – we used to put up drawing shows – we weren't supposed to put up things as though they were finished works. We'd just plaster drawings all over to cover all the available space. They were studies. But you really did learn to draw. He knew how to show you what you were really seeing, not what you knew. To move you from what you knew. For instance, you know that the backbone is in the middle of the back, and no matter how much somebody bends you tend to put that backbone where you know it is, not where you see it is. He was able to show you that, the degree to which the figure in your mind isn't the figure in front of you that you're drawing. Now I think that was very valuable.

MEH: What media did you use in drawing?

VW: We mostly used pencil, but I think we would have used ink sometime. I know Ruth Asawa had a lot of – My memory is of ink drawings. We didn't shade things, hardly at all. Thinking of her drawings more than mine somehow, I see little patches of dark in places. But we didn't do shaded studies. We did line drawings. We did contour drawing. I had done contour drawings in high school quite a lot. We did funny things. We did marvelous things in drawing classes. We drew – we learned to draw the Bodoni alphabet freehand by organizing the spaces into thirds. We – I remember making a Chinese newspaper – fake. We made fake surfaces, fake writing. We wrote upside down and backwards.

MEH: What was the purpose of this?

VW: To increase your facility at drawing, and your familiarity with forms. We wrote backwards because you always write forwards and you stop seeing what you write. If you have to write it backwards, you begin to see it as a form, right? You construct letters, you are carving a form with your pencil out of this space. We learned to measure freehand with our eyes. We drew circles. We drew lines without rulers. I mean we developed, I think, a marvelous facility to measure with our eyes, which is part of drawing. You know, to divide off a paper so that everything fitted, but just as this part of your nature. Oh, yeah, we did draw with pens, because I remember they sold coquille points and pens in the store, so we would have brought our ink, because we didn't draw with fountain pens.

MEH: What do you think, looking back, of Albers teaching you really carried with you into your own work as an artist and illustrator?

VW: An adventurousness, further freedom with my imagination – which I had already had a good start in. A love of black and white, because, even though I took color, I did a lot of black and white there. A love of drawing. A love of line. Graphic – a fondness for graphic representation. But also color. I mean in my books – when anybody reviews them or what, I am thought of as greatly, you know, greatly connected to colorful presentation. A freedom with color. Like we didn't have – There was nothing tasteful about our approach to color. We just explored it, you know. And got to see it in subtle ways. I think all of that was absorbed. But also this idea that we then tried to bring to our later community even though it was not an artist community totally was that all of life – that art is something that runs through all of life, that it's not – doesn't have just to do with great painters and all. That's, I must say, Mary, that is one thing that I have felt has been so misunderstood about Black Mountain because of the famous people. That was not what it was about. Albers's attention to how we kept the road, to what color we painted everything. I remember him running over, when I was painting in the Dining Room, the walls, grabbing me and my brush, pushing me to some little corner that had been neglected and getting me to do it, you know, paint that. He just had his attention all over. He was bossy, too. He was very bossy. He taught me to waltz, and I remember him saying, "Women, girls, don't lead." He would steer me forcefully around the floor. He was bossy. He was, you know, tyrannical to a certain extent, and a purist – in a certain way. In another way not. I was also very impressed over the years that all those people he brought there in the summer were not clones of himself, by any

means. Right? Yet he had a great respect for them and provided a lovely environment in his own home for little suppers and things. I'm surprised that I remember him so nicely in that way, but I certainly also do remember that he was tyrannical. He also was pushy about girls, you know. When he came to your study, he would feel you up your leg, like that. I mean he never really pushed himself on me, but I remember that, and we would talk about it. Girls would talk about it. I kept a bottle of scotch in my studio. Because I graduated under him, so he was my sole person for awhile. Not only because I also did a lot of work in the Print Shop and worked with – what was his name? Young Rice.

MEH: Frank.

VW: Frank was also – Frank, Junior, yeah, who helped reestablish the Print Shop, though students mostly did that. But anyway I would offer Albers a little drink and sort of keep him a little at bay. But in that time we didn't understand all that so much and we weren't so aware of it as a totally damning fault but as more of something that you didn't welcome necessarily and kind of tried to maneuver your way around.

MEH: Did you ever go to his studio?

VW: In his home? I certainly went to his house a lot. I don't think – Probably I went to his studio. Yeah.

MEH: You said you took weaving. Would that have been with Anni Albers?

VW: Yeah. Let's see, was it with Anni? Or with Trude Guermonprez? I don't remember who I took weaving with. I only took weaving for I think a semester. I

do not like thread and strings and all those although I've done a lot of sewing and things like that. I was never very good at that, but I was intrigued with making the patterns. I wove – Did I weave it myself? Yeah, I wove two things that I used. I wove a piece of black and white that had a certainly Paul Klee quality to it, and under the direction of Johanna Jalowetz, I bound a book that I made in that fabric that I had woven. So, I wove the fabric, I made the pictures, wrote the story, bound the book. Then when – I made a little jerkin, a little vest, over-the-head vest, that I wore to my wedding – to get married in. I don't call it a wedding. To the marriage ceremony. I had woven that. So I did succeed in weaving some things. I wouldn't say that I was an ace weaving student.

MEH: You don't really remember whether it was with Trude or with Anni. Yeah.

VW: You could tell from the date, because if I took it when Anni was gone –

MEH: Well, '48, it could have been either of them. They were both there that year. It sounds more like –

VW: It might have been both. I mean maybe Anni came sometimes and Trude did most of it. I don't know.

MEH: There also was somebody there, Franziska Mayer, teaching weaving.

VW: Yes. Franziska. I remember her. She was small.

MEH: She was a relative of Max Dehn, I think.

VW: Yeah?

MEH: A refugee.

VW: I don't remember. I don't remember about the weaving. I just remember doing it. It was a lovely studio, with light – it was all filled with light.

MEH: You had a study in the Studies Building?

VW: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: What do you think was the effect of having your own little studio, as a student?

VW: Well, it was wonderful. I mean, I had never had my own room in my whole life. I had always shared a room with my sister. We had always lived in a small – at least within my memory – in small places. So, it was wonderful. I fixed it up a little bit. I made a desk. I took carpentry with Mary Gregory. I think I took that from the time I came. I was very intrigued to do all those things. I made a desk with a leg that I turned on the lathe, and she helped me. It was an oak desk and a turned leg, and it had a little shelf for books. It was different than other people's desks. The standard desk [LAUGHS], as I remember, ran all across your studio and was a double – a board and then a board under it so you could put things in it. There were very standard things that people did, but my studio didn't look like that. I painted it that – at least three walls were that kind of grayish-green, as I remember, and I got a Mexican rush mat for it. It was wonderful having a studio. The whole studio building experience was wonderful. Saturday nights, when you would hear Mahler from every door – at least in my, in the first – I don't remember so much of my very first time there, months there in my studio. But I fixed up my studio right away. I don't remember having any trouble getting used to it. It was like going to camp. It was like being in your favorite children's book. It had a farm. I would work in the milk room. I loved all that. I loved it. I didn't have a hard time talking at meetings, you know.

I had been raised to kind of do those things, even though I had not been raised in the country. But somehow it all appealed to me. [LAUGHS]

MEH: Having come from a fairly politically conscious family, how was it to be at Black Mountain in this much more esoteric atmosphere? Was there really any interest in what was happening in the outside world at that time?

VW: Well, I came right after this big split over admitting black students. Nobody wanted to talk about it. A lot of people had left. I guess that was when Eric Bentley left, I don't know who else. People had left. Nobody would tell you anything. I had a roommate, Marilyn Bauer, I think. She was about to graduate in weaving. She had been sort of set back by the loss of teachers in some way, and she refused to tell me anything. [LAUGHS] I think I just fell for the aesthetic preoccupation. Did I feel it was completely devoid of politics? A little bit. I mean, I did feel a little bit like the students were not a familiar kind of person to me, because I was a real urban kid. I had gone to an avant garde school, had been part of a whole lot of intellectual talk, you know, had belonged to the American Student Union and YCL, had then become a pacifist, had gone to discussion groups, all those things. It was really – didn't have that. I thought that was strange. I thought that the girls and women there – the young ones, not the teachers – were terribly unable to express themselves. There was a sort of cult of inarticulateness. You know, Aki Gropius, whom I liked a lot and was a friend of mine, she had a just terrible time saying what she wanted to say. I didn't get that, and I felt a little bit like a loudmouth. I was both proud of it and kind of

embarrassed by it, but I mean a part of that was because I was just a New York Jewish kid.

MEH: Accustomed to talking.

VW: Yeah. Talking loud. I came from a loud family, too, and full of opinions. I was full of opinions.

MEH: What did you do as part of the work program?

VW: My regular job was the milk room. I did it with Lucy Swift, I think. I did – sometimes she did mornings and I did evenings. I don't remember which – but our job was to – the milk – was to handle the milk. The milk was not pasteurized and consequently had to be monitored and cooled immediately. The temperature had to be lowered. It came down in two five-gallon cans and then we transferred it into smaller cans and poured it through, poured it over refrigerated pipes, which were the back of the refrigerators. The big refrigerators that served the – Well, the walk-in coolers that served the kitchen had pipes, in which refrigerant flowed, and there was a big funnel and you poured the milk through the funnel and it sheeted down over this and then into cans. We skimmed it and we made butter, and I loved all that. That's why I referred to Heidi. I just loved all that. I also – I was leaving out – I had a period of kind of becoming very ascetic, when I was there. I made myself a little Chinese jacket. I don't know what that was modeled on. I think maybe Mary Gregory had one, or some of the students I admired had them. I made it with little hand stitches. I made it beautifully. I made little fastenings and I washed it at night and wore it every day and kind of, you know, refused to have much

choice of clothing. It was odd, that way, something I wanted from life that
[LAUGHS] I was trying to institute.

MEH: Did you go – I hate to say "off campus," because it really wasn't a campus as
such. But did you go into Asheville or Black Mountain at all?

VW: Yeah, but we didn't go often. There was very little gasoline. I hiked and climbed
a lot. I took up with boys and men and went hiking with them whenever
possible. I was, of course, you know, eighteen, very interested in sex and love
and romance and all of that. Had been raised kind of free-thinking and wild. Not
– I mean, not that my mother approved of that, but I had become that way in
high school, party kids you know. I remember we used to run – walk fast and
run – the back way down to the highway and have buttermilk and sweet potato
pie at this little place. That was great. Occasionally we went — you know, we
had a designated driver, actually, Susie Schaufler, who was not supposed to
drink, and we would go to I forget the name of the place – I'm sure somebody
has told you it.

MEH: Roy's or Ma Peek's.

VW: Mom Peek – yeah? How was it?

MEH: It was – Earlier it was Roy's, and then it changed to Peek's.

VW: Yeah, to have beer and chicken sometimes. There was a kind of art supply,
some kind of store where you could buy certain things that they didn't have at
the school – in Asheville. I remember going to Asheville. I remember Asheville.
I remember Albers – Now that was – See, who would ever have thought of
such a thing? He told us to do this lettering and then he said, "Look at the sign

at the Quality Bakery". The Quality Bakery – and this was an old style of lettering where the A and the L in "QUALITY", followed, because you get a very odd space in there and no amount of moving them will fix that. It had a little star shape painted in there, and that was a kind of standard. I remember that. I've remembered that all my life. I remember how to letter space, you know, which just came from my drawing course. I remembered him pointing out how buildings were held together with tie-irons – old brick buildings, you know, and they have these designs on the ends of the tie-irons that you see? I mean, all sorts of odd information that I had, that I was fascinated by because I'm very visual, and he just added – you know, that art education added to that. I went on a three-day hike to – quite against everybody's advice. I think Jagna, myself, and a tall young woman whose name I don't remember went. Three of us went or four of us went and we took sleeping bags and we hiked – Oh, they dropped us off on the truck somewhere over more toward Mount Mitchell, and we hiked to Mount Mitchell, and I fell in the primeval forest. It was a first growth, beautiful first growth forest of hemlock on Graybeard Mountain, I believe, and I fell and sprained my ankle. The other hikers carried me – they made a stretcher and carried me half the way, part of the way to Mount Mitchell and they couldn't any more so they sent me down and ran ahead to the tower there, and they got the ranger to come with a chair. He carried me the rest of the way and the college came and got us and was angry at us. So I had a lot of adventures. Oh, I worked on the farm, too. I helped – I painted – When they enlarged the farmhouse, I painted – I forced myself to go up this tall, tall ladder and paint the

very top. I liked the certain job of running around in the silage storage, with your collar all buttoned up – tramping down the silage. I liked the work a lot. I hauled coal. I made myself sick the first period I was there, hauling coal. I remember that. Just exhausted myself.

MEH: Did you have – You were there when Germany surrendered. That would have been the spring of '45. Do you remember that?

VW: No. I do not remember that. I remember when Japan – I remember when the bomb was dropped and Japan capitulated. That was in the summer and I wasn't there. I was in New York. But I don't remember that. You'd think I would have. Has anybody else spoken of that? I'd be very interested in that.

MEH: Yeah. I've only started asking that question. People do remember Pearl Harbor who were there then. Definitely what they were thinking at that moment, you know, where they were, what they were doing. People also remember the surrender of Japan, which I think – since that was the end of the War – was more significant in people's minds.

VW: You know, when you say it, something comes to me – the sense that the War was almost over. Something in the spring, some excitement.

MEH: Right. You left at the end of the summer of '45. You came back to New York? You were there –

VW: [OVERTALK] I left in spring – I was not there the first summer.

MEH: Right. End of spring I meant. Okay. What did you do then?

VW: I went back to the camp. I think I had been there the year before. It was a camp for disabled children that was then called Crippled Children's Camp. It was in

Jersey, it was a very good camp, the kids did every – you know, we had a baseball team, we had a garden, we had swimming and everything, and the people there were very interested in grooming me to become a trained educator for the handicapped. I liked that camp. I remember – Did someone visit me there? No, not that year, the following year. So that's what I did.

MEH: And then you returned in the fall for a full year at the college.

VW: Yeah.

MEH: And that would have been '45-'46.

VW: But, you know, that's interesting, because I remember being in New York City in Times Square with a boyfriend celebrating the end of the War. Yet I would have been working.

MEH: Maybe you had like a weekend or something.

VW: Yeah, because that would have been in August. Right. Maybe that was right at the end of camp. It's a puzzler.

MEH: So, you returned, and you met Paul Williams at Black Mountain. He came that next year, the fall of '46. What was Paul Williams like?

VW: [LAUGHS] Well. He was very handsome. He was tall. He was – I suppose he was somewhat shy, but seemed very involved in the school. Such a totally different background than I was. He had a car. He was very interested in, you know, the art and architecture. He was very interested in history too. Corkran, who taught history there, had come from North Shore Country Day where Paul had gone. He was just a, you know, really different than people I had known in my background. He was from the Midwest. He was WASP. He seemed very

together to me, whereas I seemed very strewed about. I don't know. I can't answer that question too much [LAUGHS]. He certainly seemed attractive and different.

MEH: Right. So Paul was there. You met him at that point. That would have been '46-'47. I've forgotten our chronology –

[DV CASSETTE 1 ENDS; DV CASSETTE 2 BEGINS]

VW: Now my chief sense of the War, at Black Mountain, had to do with there being very few men there, with a certain privation – we hauled our own coal, which we would not have done before I don't think.

MEH: No, the girls did do it before –

VW: They always did it?

MEH: But they had help – more help from guys.

VW: of certain connections – boys I'd known in high school, I mean my whole high school class, or a lot of my high school class, went into the army. But the boyfriend I had in my last years of – well, through most of high school – didn't go, and that's an interesting aside. He couldn't – He never came to visit, though I wanted him to. He could not come because he was black, and it was deemed too dangerous. I mean, I actually quite foolishly was going to arrange it all, and then his mother said, "Forget it," you know. "You're not going down there." We eventually came apart. But I continued to see him and write to him through my first year there, I think. I'm not too clear about all that. But a sense of the War is not sharply in my mind, which is odd, when you think that it was, you know, taught by refugees and –

MEH: But generally I hear from students that there was a feeling that maybe the refugees among themselves discussed what was happening to family and this sort of thing, but it wasn't something they really discussed with students.

VW: Then right after the War – Well, right after the War we were very aware of the starvation in Europe, and we organized this day of not having our regular meals and contributing the money.

MEH: Mush Day.

VW: Mush Day.

MEH: What do you remember about Mush Day?

VW: I remember a lot of conflict over it. Certain people who felt we should be helping – What about poor people in the United States, you know? We certainly were in an area where there were plenty of poor people in the mountains, right? So there was a lot of conflict about that. But I remember wanting to do it.

MEH: Do you remember Peter Nemenyi?

VW: Oh, very well. Yeah. He instituted it. I was very friendly with Peter. We used to hike and I liked Peter. I also have to remember, one of the reasons that I didn't follow the War quite in the way I might have is that I was a pacifist already. Now from this vantage, I absolutely cannot support that idea, but I was very aware of the amount of suffering. I attributed it more to war. I think that's true. I'm vague about these things. But shortly after that – I was close to the conscientious objectors who came to work at the school – Ralph Beckley (SP?), but this was sort right at the – must have been right near the end of the war. Charlie

Bloomstein had been in prison as a conscientious object- – he was a Socialist.

The two farmers, Trayer and –

MEH: Moles.

VW: And Moles were from the CPS camps. So, there were – there was, you know, there was a Quakerism and a pacifism, strain of that at the school, and I was inclined toward that. I used to read a journal called Politics, put out by, I think the editor was MacDonald, and through them I adopted or began to send money in support of first a family in Belgium who had suffered in the War. I think Paul and I did that together before we married, and later, much later on, I adopted a Spanish refugee family who'd gotten marooned in southwest France, through that magazine. So I was in some way political, but not – I don't remember a big consciousness of the War.

MEH: Did you –

VW: I'm ashamed to say that, you know. How could that be?

MEH: Was the college integrated when you were there?

VW: It was making attempts at it. Our biology teacher, whose name I don't remember – I took biology – was exchanged with a black biologist who came. Actually it was with him that I took biology. Vesta came, the singing student. Mark Fax, a composer, came. I remember that. I was washing the Dining Room floor with a mop, and he was practicing on the piano. He came over to me, and he said "I've done a lot of that in my life. I'll show you how to do it." He showed me the – You know, I was doing it this way. He says "You can cover much more of the floor in one thing if you do it in a Figure Eight." [LAUGHS] See now,

where else would that have happened? Right? I mean the people who taught were so intimately connected with how you ran the place. I think that was wonderful.

MEH: How would you describe life in the Studies Building generally? What was the atmosphere there? How did it function?

VW: Well, it was – it was where you belonged. It was just – that's where you went, and that's – Many exciting things went on there. It had that wonderful little reading room right where you came in, with benches made from old car seats. But they weren't just – It wasn't like in the '60s where people just stuck those things on the floor and sat on them, but little wooden structures that had been made to hold them so they looked like little sofas. You could read quite a range of periodicals there and all. There was a bulletin board. Then so there was this mix of a private place and a public place, you know, and then the classrooms where there, so it was really the locus of our, of our life – much more than the buildings we lived in. The buildings we lived in were kind of primitive. They were poorly heated. They didn't really have – you know, they just had beds. Well, they did have those big fireplaces, and we had tea. Have you been told about tea? We had regular teas that were – We had a housemother-like – Annette I remember as the first one. Then possibly one of the Rices took it over or maybe she had had it first. But anyway they endeavored to – You know, they made sure we got sheets and all those things and endeavored to make a pleasant life for us in those buildings so we had tea at the fireplace.

MEH: This was in the lobby of the Lodge, where you lived?

VW: Yeah. Yeah. I lived in – They had names, those lodges, maybe having to do with the compass – north and west or east, I don't know. I don't remember. Yeah, I lived – First – I shared a room first with this Marilyn, who then graduated, and then Betty Jennerjahn came and took her place. Betty and I had a room together and that was great. Then also you know you had a sex life in your study. The Study Building was very sexy. You could put out a Do Not Disturb sign, and that was supposed to be so you could work, you know, but really a lot went on in those studies, right? A sexy life, and you would hear music coming out, and then people had little parties in their studies. But people also did work in them. You know, you took your senior exam – I took my exam in my study, or they gave it to me. It took about eight hours, I think.

MEH: What do you remember – Do you have any particular recollection of the senior exam?

VW: I remember a question that said "Talk about the phases of the moon." I don't think that was a scientific question. It had to do with the influence of the moon on you [LAUGHS] – I remember that question. I don't remember what all was on it. Some quite odd questions were on it, and then regular math and questions related to the subjects you had studied. I had to take – I took remedial math when I got there, because I'd never been good at it.

MEH: Who taught that?

VW: I think Dehn. I hope not. I hope he didn't have to teach that. I don't remember who taught that, but I did take that. I could say I haven't the slightest memory of what we did in it.

MEH: Do you have any particular memories of interlude?

VW: Oh, yes. Interlude was wonderful. The excitement before it, you know, the feeling. Well, I did want to add that about the Study Building, the feeling that would sometimes pervade the Study Building of depression and the long winter and boredom and irritation with everybody, and bad unsuccessful intimacies, and inability to do any good work. You know, that would get – that would attack the place and that's when we would have, Interlude would be announced, you know, and that would be wonderful.

MEH: And what was Interlude?

VW: Oh, Interlude was this week – it was usually a week – and it was announced very specifically from the hour in which it would start to the hour in which it would end. So it was either five or seven days, as I remember, in which you could do whatever you wanted. You had to stay there. You couldn't leave, but you could do your own project. All classes were suspended, and I guess work had to go on. We always did the milk room and the butter and all. You could take up projects. I don't remember any of the projects I took up. I may have done my little book a lot in that project. I was always very project-oriented. Like I re-did the shelving in the milk room and all. I made things in the carpentry shop. I participated in making these little kind of wooden dishes that Mary Gregory designed, and spoons to go with them. I made a broom closet.

MEH: What was Mary Gregory like?

VW: Well she was part of this aesthetic special group, the "in group" – Slater, and Mary Gregory, and the Alberses, and the Dreiers, and, you know, the "in"

people with the right clothes and the right background and all that that I thought highly of, you know – wished to be part of. But she was wonderful, you know. She fitted my idea of how, you know, the kinds of range of things that women should do. I liked her. She was my advisor and she was not distant at all. She was warm, she was helpful. I can remember going to her in tears. I mean, I think as I tell this, you know, I present it all as much more without bumps and problems than it had. But I mean after all, you know, you were young, you were away from home, you were interested in relationships, I was very short of money. Mostly I remember it happy, and I remember her. I loved going to her study. She had a beautiful study. I believe she made those wonderful benches that were in the Art Room, which we all liked.

MEH: We'll maybe come back to some other questions, but first you – You returned – You left for a period when Albers was on sabbatical, and then you returned to the college.

VW: I left to conserve money. I only was – You know, each I applied again for this grant from the Foundation. I knew that, you know, I couldn't just extend going to college and that by then I had decided to be an art student so I decided I shouldn't waste the money.

MEH: And then you returned and graduated, and you attended the summer of 1948, that summer session. Do you have any particular memories of that summer? The people who were there – Cage and Cunningham. De Kooning.

VW: Oh, yeah. It was a fabulous summer. I remember it. I was preparing for my graduation. I believe that I may have drawn the cover of the announcement of

that summer – if not that summer, it would have been another one. Maybe it was another one.

MEH: I think it was '50. 1950.

VW: The one that I drew, yeah. I remember being, I believe, being in the position of providing a lot of the signage for announcements of events. I don't remember which summers these happened in, exactly, but I know that in one of the summers Betty and Pete and I and Paul, who had a little recorder group – I think we taught ourselves, or Pete taught us – and we, and Merce Cunningham did a dance suite, a Bach dance suite, and we played the recorder except that we just all broke up during the gigue and we couldn't get through it. I remember doing that. I remember being very involved in their visit and everything. They had come on a visit in the spring, before they were invited back, and I remember making a lunch for them to take when they left, you. We were just all very – e were very taken with them.

MEH: That summer that they were there, do you remember the Satie play at all, the festival?

VW: Oh yeah.

MEH: Were you involved at all with the costumes? Or the [OVERTALK]..

VW: I was involved with the program, which I may have printed, or some element of that. I was not in it. What did I do for it? I did do something for it, but I don't know what. But a funny – I have a funny little memory of that. I believe that Al Lanier made the feet for the monkey sofa and they were human feet. He made them out of papier maché, and for some reason they ended up in the cupboard,

in the closet in Minimum House. I didn't know they were there, and I remember – They were life-sized, you know. I remember discovering them [LAUGH], being quite startled! That's the summer of which, now?

MEH: It was the summer of '48.

VW: '48. So I would have gotten married at the beginning of that summer.

MEH: You were married in the Quiet House.

VW: In the Quiet House, yeah. We went to live in one of those buildings. We had a little apartment in one of the buildings up the hill where the faculty lived. There was also a lot of strife right then between, particularly in the spring right before we were married, because I know when we were married there was all these people not, there were all these people not speaking to each other. So, in inviting people to the wedding – to the marriage ceremony – if I remember rightly, we just put up a notice on the bulletin board saying we were getting married at a certain time and everybody was invited, because we didn't want to choose between people, because we were friendly with both the Wallenites and the Albersites.

MEH: I think the Wallen people had left by then, but there still were some – It may have been with the M.C. group, I think, and Bill Levi. There was friction at that point. [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION & IRRELEVANT REMARKS]

VW: I just want to be sure that I'm not, you know, fixing this all up in retrospect or something. It's very hard to remember all of it, because it also – It came, you know – Your college years are a period of so much turmoil and struggle to be a person, and, you know, different from your family. I know that was a big part of

the whole thing. That was a big part of my attraction to certain people there and all was the sense that I was forming myself in a new way. I mean it wasn't until much later, many many many years later, that I realized how much I was formed and valuably formed in the cauldron of Jewish radical urban life, you know, and how much that had given me. I certainly couldn't have quite said that then, though I did say it a little bit in a paper that I wrote in the Lowinsky class. Lowinsky was valuable to me that way, because there wasn't very – Even though there were, as I said, all these Jewish people there, there was not a big sense of Jewishness.

MEH: After you and Paul were married – He had been working on the Minimum House in that first period. Were you involved at all with the Minimum House?

VW: Oh yeah. I put the windows in.

MEH: What about the planning? Here you were, I mean no real architects – you know, students with bits and pieces of architectural experience. What was the idea of – I mean, do you remember the idea behind this, how it all came about?

VW: Well yeah, I think that because there were architecture students and no architect – When did Paul Beidler come? Was he after the Minimum House or before? Because I remember –

MEH: He was before. He was I think the summer of '46.

VW: Before. Yeah, well I remember he was, you know, he – So they had an architecture person, and we worked on that music practice building. I remember helping lay the walls for that. I was very interested in doing building. I was influenced by Mary. But I've been very feminist – all my childhood too – so I, in

fact I had learned to carpenter a little bit. I'm not a carpenter by any means, but I had learned to do those things in Settlement House, you know, to saw and hammer and build, and there wasn't anything I thought that I shouldn't do, as a girl, you know. Certainly I was supported in this by the image of Mary and other people there – Mary Gregory and other people there. Even though I would never say that women were completely as forceful in Black Mountain as men were, but some of them were, and they influenced me. So there were the architecture students – Rags Watkins, Al Lanier, Paul Williams. I don't know who else. There may have been another at least – with no, no teacher, but wanting to build. Paul, particularly, believed in hands on architecture for architects. His mother gave the money to do it. She had previously given a sum of money to redo the kitchen and – to a certain extent – and the Dining Room to do some work on that, and then she gave this money. I think it was a thousand-some dollars, not a lot more than that, to build this house. So the idea was to see how – whether they could design an inexpensive contemporary little house in the woods, for one or two people. And, you know, using some of the stone from the place. Rags Watkins's father was in the lumber business and he provided – I don't know if free but at a low price – this beautiful cypress plywood, as I remember. It was beautiful. I think it was cypress. So that's how that building came about. They all worked, they all worked on designing it. They may have had advice. There were always architects to get advice from, you know, because they were on the board, right, and they would visit. We were the first people who got to live in it. The windows were designed in a way that made

it very hard to put them in, so a special tool was made. They couldn't be put in with a regular putty knife. I think I had learned to do that at the farmhouse, or Mary Gregory taught me how to put in windows and glazier's points and like that, and so I did the windows.

MEH: When you left, Paul was going to school at Harvard at that point, did you – At that point, did you all have any particular ideal of community, or was it really just his, you know, getting to school? Were you thinking of yourself more as a couple? I mean, later you began to move, at Hyde Park and with The Land, toward thinking of community as a part of your life.

VW: I think that – That's an interesting question, Mary. I don't think we really thought of ourselves as a couple starting a household. I mean, we had enough money, actually, to have lived much better than we lived, and to have had a household. We never acquired linens, household equipment, just a very minor amount that was given us kind of at our marriage at the school. I think maybe I would have liked that more than he. He had, he had had enough of well-to-do bourgeois life. He was not interested in it at all. I had a hankering for goods in a way that he didn't, because he'd always been oppressed by them. I had had a dearth of them, right? On the other hand, you know, we had learned to – or we believed in a very modest life. Albers had a very modest life, you know, these well-known people. Dreiers, from a well-to-do family had a very modest life. That's what we believed in. So I don't think we really imagined that we were going to set out as a couple into the world. I think we imagined we were going to do big things in some way, and that going to school, going to Harvard, was

kind of an interlude. As many young married, particularly women who I – that was their hard year. Because I didn't register fulltime for school, and I thought I would be an artist, but I didn't do that in a fulltime way. I was lonely. We moved to Boston. We didn't move to Cambridge, which would have been different. We didn't get absorbed in student life. We fixed up a basement. I put the windows in that too. I painted that. I did a lot of the work on that because Paul was already at school. Then I started an after-school program in my basement, and a two-day-a-week nursery school, because I just – I have never understood and I still don't. I have an apartment and I hardly use it, I just have never understood individual life in that way. Yes, the individual life of the mind and the soul and art, but somehow a household [LAUGHS] that you make it your business to do, I don't think I get that really. You know, so there I was, once we had, you know, fixed it up modestly – it was a crummy place, really – but we got to know our Italian landlord and got kind of in with them and the kids some. The lady, the lady painter, the lady window doer, you know. I got friendly with the kids and they would come around all the time, so I kind of got them organized.

MEH: And so then after a year in Boston you returned to Black Mountain. How did that come about? Why did you go back?

VW: Well, as I say, I don't think we thought that this was life, really, just school was out. I think the college needed peo – needed us too. I think there had been conversations that I don't really remember.

MEH: Right. Albers – The Alberses had left that year.

VW: Yeah, I think they were in bad shape and needed people. I think we were very happy to go back.

MEH: And you were dietician?

VW: Yeah. When did I start to do that? I must have done that – Did I do that the summer before I graduated? I did it with June Rice.

MEH: No, I think you did it when you went back, that year of '49-'50 and that summer. Just going back, not speaking necessarily of your being a dietician, but what was mealtime like at Black Mountain?

VW: A lot of the time it was wonderful. When people were gloomy, and when there was tension – which there was a lot, you know – it wasn't so great. But when anything really good was going on, and in the summer when there were a lot of new people and all that, it was exciting. It was a little noisy. The tables were made of transite [PH], which I think was a mistake. [LAUGHS] It was kind of one of those architectural ideas, but that's very noisy stuff. The dishwasher was noisy. It was in the kitchen, but you could still hear it. You had to – There was often the feeling there wasn't going to be enough food, you know, so – The food, you got it on platters, you know, so there was a big rush to go get your platter re- – get everybody's dish filled and run and get more. I do remember that. But then sometimes you would just sit for a long time at the tables, and then in summer we ate on the porch and that was really nice. You got to know people. Some people I'm sure felt left out and other people always ate with the same people. Some people ate in a brooding way all alone, you know. I liked breakfast a lot. For one thing, I'd had access to all this cream, which I'm sure

didn't do me any good in the long run [LAUGHS], since I have suffered from high cholesterol, but I would just ladle cream onto oatmeal, you know, in a lavish way. I loved taking care of the – I was very intimate with the kitchen, you know. I liked it a lot. I like cooking. I wasn't a cook, but, you know, I just liked being connected to the food and the cream and the milk. I loved making the butter, and I sent away for information about how to make cheese and I learned to make cottage cheese. I made strawberry – I picked wild strawberries and made strawberry jam. I arranged for the painting, and did a lot of it, of the kitchen and dining room on one of the vacations, which – and I made the paint out of milk, because there was a surplus of – We couldn't sell milk for a week or ten days, you know, and we didn't have any contract to sell milk, so we – but there were the cows and the milk, so we had to – [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION AND IRRELEVANT REMARKS]

MEH: When I come back, we'll do the book, okay, because it'll take me like half an hour and the days are short, and this is a beautiful one. But let's just talk a little bit more about the milk. You were saying you just had this attachment to the milk.

VW: I had this attachment to the milk and to the whole provisioning of the place. It didn't seem to floor me that it was a large number of people. I know that June and I offered to make Thanksgiving dinner, you know, and neither of us had ever cooked a turkey and we cooked five of them, and arranged the whole thing. It was the same night that we did the Satie performance. Not the Satie, I'm sorry, no. The – I'm sorry, it wasn't the Satie, it was the Cocteau.

MEH: Marriage on the Eiffel Tower?

VW: Marriage on the Eiffel Tower. I was in that, and I also helped decorate, turn the Dining Room into the Eiffel Tower with blue paper and all like that, all around it.

MEH: [INTERRUPTION] This is your new book, Vera?

VW: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: [TECHNICAL REMARKS] No, let's not do this.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]