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MEH.

**[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW. BEGINNING OF TRANSCRIPT.]**

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

**CF:** I grew up in Minneapolis. I'd taken an art job right out of high school helping out a fascinating man who made the advertising for a number of the major motion picture theaters in Minneapolis. He had a lovely little studio up in the top of the theater. I got to see all the movies there, and I helped fill in his black and white drawings for the theater ads. I was working in what in those days was called "commercial" art. I was there a year-and-a-half and was puzzling over what I was going to do with the next years, knowing I wasn't going to stay there. In St. Paul I had a dear friend Jim Penney [PH], a very close older friend, who was a kind of guru to me. I was very involved in Methodist youth groups, and in that environment he was a breath of fresh air. He was a visiting speaker at a camp I went to. He sat around with a group of young people and talked about things. I immediately knew he had a picture of the world that I wanted to know more about, which was not Methodism. His background was Quaker and he had spent a lot of time traveling extensively, primarily in the U.S., with a toothbrush in his pocket, exploring contacts, friends, networks of people that

had similar ideas that he had. He was very interested in the concept of an experimental community. In that context he visited Black Mountain and stayed there a few days. He felt my interest in continuing my education. He said, "You should go down and visit Black Mountain." I made a hitchhiking trip down there with his younger brother, and we spent a couple days. Everything started then.

**MEH:** So, do you remember the first time you went to Black Mountain, how you traveled there physically?

**CF:** Yes, I hitchhiked down with Jim's younger brother. That was a long, wild trip [LAUGHS]. I remember getting through the mountains of West Virginia, even at night some of the time. That was a rigorous trip. I think we did take some public transportation in a couple places, but pretty much we hitchhiked all the way. It was a time in the country that you could hitchhike around the world and not run into any great problems. I later did it with Maude Dabbs. We hitchhiked back to Minneapolis once. It was a different world.

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

**CF:** My mother was of mixed European descent, French, English. She grew up in Grand Rapids and was a house mother. My father was born in Sweden and came over to this country when he was about three years old. He still had a lot of Sweden in him and used to occasionally cook lutefisk. He worked for a major lumber company in Minneapolis that had a chain of lumberyards around the Dakotas, Minnesota, Wisconsin. He was the primary buyer for the lumber chain. Black Mountain was not a part of their world, really.

**MEH:** But they were willing to let you go.

**CF:** Oh, yes. As I recall, I had saved up some five hundred dollars from my job. I had another job – a paid job – after working with this guy who did the theater ads. I worked for a year for an auto supply company doing graphic design. I think I gave Black Mountain what money I had.

**MEH:** You visited, and then it was in the fall of 1940 that you enrolled when they were building the Studies Building?

**CF:** Right. They invited me to come down during the summer, to kind of get familiar with everything. I remember immediately they put Bob Bliss and I to work over on the site of the Studies Building, scything down all the grass and reeds. It was very swampy, and we spent days there cutting down all the undergrowth and watching for water moccasins. [LAUGHS] I don't recall that we ever saw more than one, but it had an air of being slightly precarious. We spent a lot of time there out in the sun. It was a nice way to get familiar with the college. We were living in Lee Hall at that point, and there were very few people. I was down there probably for at least a month before college opened.

**MEH:** Do you recall what your friend said about the college that appealed to you?

**CF:** Because of my interest already in not being exactly sure that the conventional approach to everything was going to keep me happy, he felt that Black Mountain and I would be a good match. He was absolutely right, and I'm very thankful for his pushing me to go and visit. I knew nothing of it in Minneapolis at that time.

**MEH:** You arrived at the college, and you and Bob Bliss were put on scrub removal duty. Had you been in the South before?

**CF:** No, I hadn't. I remember the hitchhike trip down. Jim's brother had some contacts in Louisville, and we went there for an evening, may have stayed overnight at some friends of theirs. They had I remember an attractive daughter who spoke with an incredible Southern accent, which was my introduction to the South. Still is an impression that I've never forgotten. I think, "My God, do people really talk like that?" [LAUGHS] I was very awed by the trip through the mountains. The poverty of the mountain areas was quite a shock from for my life in prosperous Minneapolis.

**MEH:** The first year that you were at the college they were building the Studies Building. That was 1940 through '41.

**CF:** I was very involved in the building, not only the clearing. I had some experience in carpentry from my father who always had a workshop. So I did a lot of construction on the Studies Building in that first year. A lot of carpentry working with Charlie Godfrey. Quite a guy. I remember particularly carpentry of floor joists and flooring the whole first floor. I disappeared after the first year at Black Mountain into a CPS camp, but later I did more work around the Studies Building.

**MEH:** You didn't go to Black Mountain planning to be an architect. Or did you?

**CF:** No, I didn't. I think it was that first year working on the building and particularly having a rather modest class with Larry Kocher, who was the resident architect there. I'd never quite conceived of being an architect, but my contact with him in that class, plus the building itself, convinced me that was really what I wanted to do. I'd had a casual interest, I remember, in Minneapolis. I had a newspaper

route and I used to bicycle around part of the south side of Minneapolis and occasionally came across a house that intrigued me. I remember going back again and again to this one house, which was a very light colored. I can't even describe any style at the moment, but it made a big impression on me that people could build a unique-looking residence like that. What I'd known was primarily typical of the house I lived in and most of the other houses around me. The Walker Museum had a modern house exhibit, where they built a small contemporary flat-roofed house in the courtyard or something. I remember going there with my mother and being very impressed seeing that totally different look to a way to live. I certainly can't say that I thought I wanted to be an architect at that time, but I was very impressed with seeing that show. When it clicked at Black Mountain, I think I put all those things together.

**MEH:** How do you remember Kocher? What was he like?

**CF:** I remember him as a very congenial guy. He had certainly a thoughtful approach to the fundamentals of contemporary design, and he was very good at communicating that to students. I now don't see him as a very important architect in the history of architecture. He'd done some very good things in England, I think. Kocher and Frye (PH) did some very progressive residential design there and some other things. Although to me now not terribly remarkable, I think his design of the Studies Building, conceived in terms of the economy – materials Black Mountain could afford – and available structural techniques, the design was a great contribution. I mean, the building is clad in industrial material – transite – and it had essentially industrial windows. He

accomplished a lot of usable space. In addition to the free labor, I think it was an economy of materials and techniques was a great contribution.

**MEH:** He did have to design a building that could be constructed by nonprofessional labor, which was a considerable challenge.

**CF:** It was a simple structure, essentially a wood-frame structure, with the exception of the concrete piers and the lally columns down underneath. I got to know that underneath area intimately because I worked one summer when I was at Harvard as their resident bulldozer loader, hauling gravel fill from out by the road. There was a deposit of gravel there. That was a one-man operation, bringing material up to fill that space under the Studies Building. I thought it was nice to get it up on a level where they had a view over that rather swampy area to the lake. I think that lower level was never was used particularly in my time. It was conceived, perhaps, as an outdoor teaching area. I had a couple classes there once, but it was pretty much a waste area, I think.

**MEH:** I think it was used during the summer sessions, when they had the special summer sessions, for outdoor classes more.

**MEH:** I have a lot of notes in terms of details such as construction. Apparently there were details such as the flat roof. The drainage instead of being on the outside of the building went through the building from the roof –

**CF:** That's not an unusual way.

**MEH:** Was it unusual at the time?

**CF:** It was a sloped flat roof. It was not absolutely flat, as I recall. It was sloped to these internal drains. It's actually in a place with snow and freezing, and it's a

well-accepted. Most industrial building is built that way. Warehouses. All this is flat roofed and drained internally. The internal drains – as opposed to gutters – don't freeze in the heated building. It is not without problems if it's not maintained, but you can probably say that the majority of roofs that are built are of that type. I mean a pitched roof is more for residential and smaller buildings.

**MEH:** Do you remember anything in particular about the pile driving situation, the beginning when it was discovered that the land was too swampy to support the building?

**CF:** Man, I'd almost forgotten that! [LAUGHS] I do remember the operation, and it must have been conceived that way from the beginning. I don't think they had ever any intention that they would support that building in that swamp, without piles.

**MEH:** Actually, they didn't realize it was going to be as swampy as it was, and that was a crisis situation: "Hey, we cannot build on this land." That was then they drove all the piles.

**CF:** I don't recall being privy to the actual process, but it could well be my memory.

**MEH:** Did you take courses or did you just work on the Studies Building that first year? Do you recall?

**CF:** No, I think Kocher taught one class in architecture, and it included some history and discussion. I think we did maybe lay out a plan for a small house or something, but we didn't do any real architectural drawing. It was a broad view of what architecture was about. It was enough to intrigue me. That's for sure.

**MEH:** Did you take any classes, like in literature or language or anything like that?

**CF:** No language. I had a lot of classes. I remember ecology, which made a big impression on me. That was I think at a point where ecology was almost a new science. All of that's a little vague in my mind, exactly all the classes I took. But I certainly remember classes – maybe that was in my second phase – with Max Dehn, mathematics.

**MEH:** That would have been in your second phase.

**CF:** I had something in psychology with Straus maybe.

**MEH:** The first year you were in Lee Hall. How do you remember Lee Hall as a building?

**CF:** I thought it was a great place for Black Mountain. I was sorry to see that transition probably at the time. I thought the fact that people both lived and studied in the same building, that sense of community was incredible. It certainly took place at Lake Eden in another way. I remember the gatherings in the afternoon for tea. That was a great part of the experience of Black Mountain at that time. I somehow probably doubt that it was ever recovered at Lake Eden, that same sense of everyone involved together in a community and the ease of access to everybody. They weren't distributed around very far away. Everyone passed through the central areas all the time. The dancing in the Dining Hall to John Evarts, and his incredible piano playing was [LAUGHS] the beginning of my dancing career. That was a delightful part of the evenings. It was always a question: is John going to play tonight? [LAUGHS] If he felt like it – He always played on Saturday night, but occasionally he'd play during the week. I enjoyed all that very much.



**MEH:** I think that was an exceptional year. The community was so totally joined by the building of the Studies Building, by everyone focusing on a single thing.

**CF:** That's true, too, as far as everyone working on the same thing.

**MEH:** Who were other students who were most involved in the Studies Building construction?

**CF:** I certainly remember Bliss was very involved, and Swackhamer, as I remember, did big work there. I don't have too many other vivid pictures at this point of the individuals.

**MEH:** What was mealtime like at the college?

**CF:** There are great similarities between Lee Hall and Lake Eden, certainly, as far as the dining areas and the sort of random groupings that occurred at all the tables. I found that illuminating. You ended up seeing and talking with people more or less by chance, depending on where you happened to sit when you came in. I found that to be an important part of the whole community life, and I think it was very elemental in renewing that sense of community.

**MEH:** I'm going to come back to the first year. Then you stayed for the '41 summer session work camp.

**CF:** That's probably true. [LAUGHTER] As far as my work goes, to put together this kind of scrapbook with the help of the computer and scanning and color printing slides and stuff and make a selection. I have a pile of stuff up in the attic, and I intend to put it in some kind of a scrapbook form. Even in starting to think about it, coming across what's left of old projects. They elicit all sorts of memories, of stories and [LAUGHS] what happened with this and that person, and what we

went through in the creation of this stuff. In that context, I remember a great deal when I have some jog, which is the actual material which we produced at that time. To see again the photographic records of it, and come across some of the documents, some of the stuff that was published –

**MEH:** Do you have materials from Black Mountain – photographs and that sort of thing?

**CF:** I have nothing. I think Ati may have ended up with anything I had. I don't know what she has even, at this point, because I also moved a number of times. I was doing photography at that time, and I remember working with John Stix at Lee Hall. We had made a darkroom out of a bathroom up on the third floor or something. I was telling somebody, who I actually was doing some work for recently, the head of Aperture Foundation, Michael Hoffman, and he said he'd met somebody the week before who was a close friend of Yella Pessl. I said, "What!" I then told him about John Stix and I. When Yella Pessl visited Black Mountain to play the harpsichord, we set her up one afternoon to play and did a whole string of photographs of her. Then I had the tragic history. We were developing all the pictures in this crude darkroom set-up and somehow something got screwed up in the developing process. Hot water got on my group of negatives [LAUGHS], eliminating half of them where the heat built up and absolutely cutting them in half. I had pictures of her hands, and sort of just a whole recording of her playing the harpsichord. All mine was wiped out. I think John has some.

**MEH:** In terms of the sequence here, you stayed for the next summer at the Work Camp. Then I don't think you would have gone directly to the CPA camp, because Pearl Harbor didn't occur until December.

**CF:** That was while I was in camp.

**MEH:** It was in camp. So you went ahead into camp before the War actually started.

**CF:** Pearl Harbor was December, and that was that same fall. I'd gone in in September into camp, at the end of that summer.

**MEH:** So how did you end up going into the camp at that point? Why did you make that decision?

**CF:** Well, I'd made a decision, even before I came to Black Mountain, knowing that the War was imminent. The group that I was with, including my dear friend Jim Penney [PH], were all opposed. We were all planning to either not register or certainly register as COs. We finally all registered as COs, but I had a heavy session. I would guess that it was sometime – it may have been in the spring of that year – when I had to register. I had some questions of whether I'd register or not and simply protest. But that also meant going to jail. [LAUGHS] I used to take long walks with Ted Dreier, talking about this, he trying to persuade me that was not the best course of action. I must admit he finally persuaded me. I remember he took me down to register as the time was running out. I registered the evening of the last possible moment [LAUGHS] and was then interviewed by a draft board in Asheville. After explaining my background and my convictions, they gave me CO status.

**MEH:** Now where was the camp that you were located in?

**CF:** The camp was in Buck Creek, which was up the line from – I'm trying to recall the town nearest by. I think it was about fifteen, twenty miles from Black Mountain, so it wasn't that bad. I guess, as is part of the history now, a lot of the people from the camp used to visit Black Mountain on weekends, including me. Used to come for concerts, lectures. It was a great, great contribution to the life of that camp. I ended up there. My older brother, who was also a CO, was working for Proctor and Gamble in Cincinnati. He was sent to the same camp – just by geographical area or something. So, we were there together, and later a group of people from Buck Creek Camp – that's what it was called – transferred to a mental hospital in Asheville. A whole group of about a dozen went there to work as attendants. I spent a year there in Asheville working in this private mental hospital. It was quite a good deal for them. I don't know how they managed it, but they got free labor. I think we all got ten dollars a month or something like that. Ten dollars a week. I did some heavy work there. I became an attendant to people taking primarily insulin shock therapy, and some electric shock therapy. It was quite an eye-opener to see what goes on. Also some of it was right tragic. I saw a couple people die in shock therapy, people I'd worked with and been an attendant to for many, many sessions. Then something goes wrong and they die during the therapy.

**MEH:** So during the War, you really were still very close to Black Mountain.

**CF:** During that period, yes, because I was either in Asheville or in Buck Creek, both of which were, I think, twenty miles away, one side or the other. That allowed the possibility of coming back there occasionally.

**MEH:** Then I have, according to my records, then in the spring of 1944 you came back to the college as a student. Did you go directly from the CPA camp to Black Mountain as a student? Do you recall?

**CF:** No. I was finally released and I came back to Asheville, not far from the hospital where I'd worked. I started again doing graphic design and managed to support myself for at least for six or eight months. I was working in Asheville, living in a small rooming house. Then I think I made arrangements to get back to Black Mountain, and that perhaps was my major phase of Black Mountain. That's the way I recall the whole Lake Eden experience part of it. I was involved in a lot of important things there, important in terms of my perspective on things.

**MEH:** So you went back [INTERRUPTION]. You took classes with Albers at that point when you went back.

**CF:** Yes, [AFFIRMATIVE].

**MEH:** His color, his design – what classes did you take?

**CF:** I took color, and I took drawing. I loved his drawing class. He was a genius at teaching drawing, as everyone acknowledges. I was so impressed with his ability to get out of relatively, totally inexperienced people these incredible drawings, by simply focusing on what you see, and translating it into line. I think he sort of took out of the drawing that I had known. In Minnesota when I was working I took an art class at the Art Institute and did oil painting and so forth. To me, his genius of seeing that the whole world of translating and interpretation of reality onto paper was a matter of your eye and the

coordination of the eye with your hand. It had nothing to do with ideas in your head.

**MEH:** So his drawing class, can you be more specific in terms of how he conducted the class, and the sorts of things that you did?

**CF:** I loved his style of sort of waddling around the class and needling everybody and getting you to see what a figure was doing, if you were doing figure drawing, which was the primary preoccupation of most of his drawing classes. Needling you into really seeing what was done. He would kind of physically act out what was happening in some way. I mean, taking exaggerated positions of the model and countering everybody's inclination to try to draw the human body as symmetrical which it never is. No one's face is really symmetrical. But when you get into figure drawing, the way he would get you to observe and to, if possible, even exaggerate the way the body was positioned in space. I think it was that sort of needling on his part and getting people to really see and observe this and translate it that produced some incredible drawings from people who previously didn't think they had – quote – "any talent for this." That was one of my most impressive experiences in Albers classes and in all of Black Mountain. It probably translates into a permanent inclination to be interested in what's there and not in what's in your head.

**MEH:** He did figure drawing and drawing from the model.

**CF:** Yes.

**MEH:** What about other types of exercises that you did in the drawing class, like lettering or – ?

**CF:** No, his just training your hand is part of it. I mean, it is a skill to be able to physically control what you draw. I also remember and probably developed there a kind of appreciation and interest in topography from the drawings we used to do of letter forms, which was a way of training your hand and at the same time observing the intricacy of form that a good typeface has. I mean a beautifully designed typeface has a kind of subtlety of forms all of which, again, relate to readability and to how your eye can put together typographic forms and form words out of them. I mean it's a highly, highly-specialized area which I have since done quite a bit of work in – even have designed a few typefaces.

**MEH:** After the War, a lot of the guys, the former GIs, had a lot of trouble with Albers's drawing class. I mean, they just thought this was a waste of time to be sitting, doing these exercises, whatever. But you didn't have a problem with that.

**CF:** Oh, not at all. I always had some ability to draw. I used to draw when I was young, in all sorts of ways. But I found most of what we did there absolutely fascinating, and I think probably fully understood its importance. I also soaked up Albers's picture of the relationship between all of these parts of the visual world. All the way from designing the gate which went into Lake Eden, which I think I did under Albers' tutelage, and sort of sensed his kind of architectonic touch with things. A big part of my life is spending some time with Albers.

**MEH:** He taught the drawing class. You also took his design class?

**CF:** I remember doing Werklehre and doing color studies. I don't ever think that I did terribly well in the color class. I think I was a bit perplexed by his kind of relating color to taste, to gastronomic taste. He applied the same kind of demonstrative

efforts there to get people to see what goes on in the relationships between color, and how this combination tastes this way. Again, needling everybody with his wonderful sort of simple and startling observations that would bring your focus to what he wanted it to be or something.

**MEH:** What was he doing with matière? What was the purpose of this?

**CF:** Well, it's another part of his intimate world of visual observation, which is the whole world of texture and how actually the relationships between color and texture of objects are so much a part of our visual observation of things. This heightened one's – As I recall, the most successful ones were ones where by relationships of color and texture you could actually confuse your perception of what the material was in the sense of hardness, softness. By associating the visual and textural qualities of materials in these Werklehre studies, I feel you got a very heightened appreciation of the qualities of materials and a heightened awareness of their texture and their relationships, possible relationships which are not, again, as pat and as contained as we like to conceptualize them. In labeling this as this and that as that, he could prove to you that you didn't really know one from the other [LAUGHS] if you put them in the right relationship to each other.

**MEH:** [INTERRUPTION]. How do you remember Albers just as a person, as an individual?

**CF:** That's a big – [LAUGHS].

**MEH:** Go ahead.



**CF:** Well, I would probably say he was primarily of a highly focused personality and deeply committed to his vision of the world, very aware of his own uniqueness in the world of the visual arts. I believe that's true. I've not seen many other major artists that had such a finely tuned relationship to color and form and material – material more in his teaching, In his beautifully geometric engraved constructions, he had the deep appreciation for process and material as to how things are done and in relation to the materials. He was stubbornly arrogant about his own convictions. I think, rightly so. I never had any problem with him. Obviously he got himself into trouble as his convictions went over into other areas that were nonvisual. But he was a remarkable man and his vision was a powerful thing. He, in a sense, made the context of Black Mountain, in a visual sense – to me. He was a point of view about the world, which went beyond, beyond purely the visual arts. It got him into a lot of trouble, but I think he had conviction about the relationship of the physical world. Few people burned as bright.

**MEH:** You said he had a particular point of view or world view. How would you describe that? What sort of scrapes did he get into, once he left the visual world?

**CF:** Well, he was considered in the politics of the college to be very dogmatic and arrogant. He thought he knew how things should be done. I probably enjoyed – not so much enjoyed –, but certainly used his point of view to try and promulgate certain actions at the college. Ran into those that were more devoted to sort of the free rein of individualism [LAUGHS]. He was very

dictatorial in some ways. I have no doubt that it infuriated many people. I don't recall any great particular situations in which I was involved. I mean I was part of the board and at a lot of meetings at some point. But I probably by inclination never got very worked up about him because I had a great respect for him.

**MEH:** How aware were you at the time of the Bauhaus, and his relationship to the Bauhaus?

**CF:** It was pretty new to me at that time. Certainly I became very familiar with the Bauhaus, but Black Mountain was the first place I'd ever heard of it. I have learned something of his work and relationships at the Bauhaus. I certainly was not aware of it earlier.

**MEH:** But the Bauhaus presence was not strong at Black Mountain in terms of – It was more an "Albers" presence?

**CF:** I would say so. He certainly translated a lot of the Bauhaus into action at Black Mountain, as far as the visual arts. I think I was not initially so aware of where it came from even. I was probably more aware of it, actually, in my teaching in Chicago. That seemed to have more relationship to the Bauhaus.

**MEH:** Do you remember architects who came and lectured at Black Mountain, particularly William Wurster, John Burchard, Gropius?

**CF:** Don't remember them too well. Burchard I recall. I remember Wurster and his wife. I don't remember the lectures. I got to know Gropius much better.

[LAUGHS] I think I have not much memory of those actual lectures. I'm sure they were of interest at the time. But I don't recall them.

**MEH:** What about other visitors? Do you remember May Sarton's visiting?

**CF:** I remember the fact. The name. But I don't remember the visit.

**MEH:** [IRRELEVANT REMARKS ABOUT SOUNDS]. Okay. You said that when you came back to Black Mountain after the War, you felt like that was really your important period at the college – or felt at the time. Why is that?

**CF:** I was a bit naive the first year I was at Black Mountain. I came back with considerably more experience and more interest in the opportunities that they afforded me there. I got involved in a lot of things – both in terms of work, physical work, and also in the community. I mean, one of the biggest events of my life was all the struggles that took place in that period, in the faculty and among the students. I was very heavily involved in this split between the students as well as the faculty.

**MEH:** Which particular issue are you referring to?

**CF:** Well, I'm thinking of Frances de Graaff and that faction. Well, let me say first that I look back on Black Mountain and think all of this is quite inevitable. It mirrors what goes on in life, nicely. It's impossible to keep an idea like what started Black Mountain in terms of education and the community intact over a long period of time with changing personnel. It's inevitable that there are efforts to make it change and grow in some way. With it goes the efforts of people who've been involved in the original history to try to maintain what they think is important. I feel that was essentially a conflict of that kind. I happen to be sympathetic to the concepts that Black Mountain started with, and I feel that the efforts to modify it did not quite comprehend fully what the original concept was and what some of the experiences of it were. I think that was an inevitable

conflict which was repeated a number of times. Yet to me it was enormously instructive about people, about relationships, about conflicts, and how and why they happen, and it was very important to me to be heavily involved in that –

**[END OF VIDEOCASSETTE 1, BEGINNING OF VIDEOCASSETTE 2]**

**MEH:** We'd been talking about the Bentley-de Graaff – I think you're right, that there were really two opposing ideas of what the college could be or should be. What do you think these ideas were?

**CF:** That is a difficult question at this point. [LAUGHS]. In retrospect, I could probably summarize the conservative point of view, but what the radical point of view was that was so challenging, I cannot say at this point except I almost look back on it as partly a matter of style almost [LAUGHS]. I don't doubt they had proposals that they wanted to sort of modify some of the structure of Black Mountain. I can't even say what it is at this point. I mean, I felt that part of it was to my mind based on a kind of style of behavior and a way of dealing with educational issues that opened up other possibilities than I think what was the original tenets of the community. I find it interesting that the issue itself has long since disappeared. [LAUGHS] This is maybe significant, even, because I feel that my observation probably from that experience and many others – and you don't have to go far, except what's happening now contemporaneously – is that positions get hardened, mostly as a matter of style. They even exaggerate each other because of that. That to me was an interesting observation which I felt at the time. I remember the student body was also split in a kind of sophomoric way, and there were certain groups which didn't really talk with other groups

because they were the opposition. I can't quite come up with his name, but there was Bill McLaughlin or something like that? He was kind of the leader of the opposition, as I recall, and at that point I was head of the student body. I was on the board at that time, but I represented kind of the head of the conservative group. In that kind of separating into totally non-communicative sort of cliques, I had great pleasure and optimism. I finally said "We have to get together and talk with each other about this." This was a shock to the system. [LAUGHS] I remember that we sat around one study, one evening. There were two or three people with me and two or three people with him – in this sort of meeting of the two sides [LAUGHS]. It was to me fascinating to see what someone would actually say in that situation. How could you continue this kind of standoff or something? I don't remember the conversation. But I remember the incident, and I do think it was, to me, illuminating that much of the exaggeration and the developed contrast of two points of view got very dissolved in that meeting. I don't recall the long term effects, but it was enormously instructive to me as to what happens in conflict situations.

**MEH:** I think that probably neither Albers nor Bentley were personalities that compromised very easily.

**CF:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely. No, those were on the opposite poles, and I'm sure that was a big part of it. I don't know what they think the substance was, but I certainly don't recall at this point.

**MEH:** The summer of 1944, that was the summer than Charlot was there, and Ozenfant.

**CF:** Yeah, that was a great summer.

**MEH:** What do you remember about that summer, besides the battle, the conflict?

**CF:** Well, I was working heavily that summer. That was one of the summers I came down from Harvard. Is that possible?

**MEH:** No, that was later. If I have this right, you came back in the spring of 1944 as what they called a "work-study student." Then you stayed through the summer and then you went to Harvard. Then you came back later.

**CF:** Okay. That could be. I know I was there for more than one summer. I was there doing a lot of work, so I was not as involved in the summer action with all the visitors as people who were there for the session. I worked every day and went to a few things in the evening. I remember Charlot and his work on the piers, and watching that. Previously that I had done all the work under the Studies Building, but I also, one of those summers, used the same backhoe loader and prepared the site which was on the north side of the Studies Building for this new sort of surplus buildings that came from the Army. But I never was at the college, when those were active. Or did they ever happen?

**MEH:** Oh, yes, very much so.

**CF:** They were used as dormitories or as classrooms?

**MEH:** Both. We'll come back to the summer of '44. You came back, if my records are right and I think they are, in the spring of '43 [44], after having worked in Asheville for a while, and stayed for that summer – the Charlot, Ozenfant summer.

**CF:** That was the – Okay.

**MEH:** The summer of the big conflict. That was the summer the Schoenberg people were there.

**CF:** [AFFIRMATIVE]. Yeah.

**MEH:** Then I think it was after that that you left and went to Harvard.

**CF:** Right.

**MEH:** Then came back –

**CF:** The following summer.

**MEH:** These were the FHA buildings.

**CF:** Right, right.

**MEH:** Yeah that would be right. In the summer of '46 you came back to the college. What do you recall about – Were the buildings actually constructed while you were there?

**CF:** No, I don't think so. I think I did a lot of earthmoving with the equipment to prepare the site, and probably did a little surveying and stuff to get it laid out to their specifications. I don't recall ever seeing the buildings.

**MEH:** They were brought in and they were used primarily as students' studies, after the war. They also were used for housing for married couples, of which there were many more after the war. At some point along the way you met your first wife, Ati, at Black Mountain.

**CF:** That was along about that time, I guess, as far as I remember [LAUGHS]. Certainly in my return there. That was a big part of my life too, for a while.

**MEH:** We'll stay with Black Mountain for a while. Going back to the summer of '44. That was the summer Charlot was there, Ozenfant, Gropius came down that summer, de Creeft.

**CF:** That was the picture on the front of your book.

**MEH:** No, no, that's the next, that's the summer of '46. The summer Jacob Lawrence was there. The first summer was the summer of the big conflict. Do you have any memories of de Creeft?

**CF:** Oh, yes, yeah.

**MEH:** How do you remember him?

**CF:** Who was the wild man from San Francisco? Was he there?

**MEH:** That was Varda. That was the second summer.

**CF:** That was '46?

**MEH:** That's the cover of the book. That's '46. But let's not try to. Let's not worry about which summer it is. Just of these people individually, do you have particular memories of any of them?

**CF:** I didn't have a lot of contact with de Creeft. I certainly remember certainly his style. Delightful man. I was not taking classes or any art classes at that time because of the work. I was doing most of the lectures and evening stuff, but I think I worked all day. I was interested in that book of quotations which has a picture of me with de Creeft or something, which I think was a rare event maybe [LAUGHS]. I think I watched his relationship with Lore, as everyone else, with fascination. [LAUGHS]

**MEH:** What about Varda? Do you have particular memories of –



**CF:** Yeah, I thought he was a wonderful guy. I was absolutely delighted with the style of his creating kind of events at Black Mountain. We did a symbolic bullfight [LAUGHS] and – [THAT WAS STAGED BY DE CREEFT. VARDA STAGED A GREEK PARTY.]

**MEH:** What do you remember – ? I was going to ask you about that. Do you remember anything about it in particular?

**CF:** No. He just staged this thing, got people to participate in it, and there were costumes and color. I think it was a beautiful sort of community event which was produced by Varda [de Creeft] in his style.

**MEH:** You mean by de Creeft.

**CF:** No, Varda. Varda – The bullfight was de Creeft?

**MEH:** [AFFIRMATIVE]. Varda was the, the Greek party. No, Varda did a Trojan Horse and the Greek party.

**CF:** [LAUGHS] I've got it all confused, you're telling me.

**MEH:** De Creeft did the bullfight. Then Varda built a wooden horse, a Trojan horse, and had a Greek party.

**CF:** That's right, that's right. [LAUGHTER] Well, see, I'm useless, useless on this account.

**MEH:** It just sort of all blends together at this point. But the parties were fun.

**CF:** I remember Varda's style. Whatever he did it was done with a beautiful visual flourish, which I thought took community events to a new level. It made an impression on me. I think I saw reflections of it in a lot of stuff later in my life.

**MEH:** Do you remember particular parties that you had at the college? Decorations, anything like that.

**CF:** Oh, absolutely. I mean I was very involved in one of the Black Mountain standard parties of checks and stripes which I think was done a number of times at different years or something. I was involved in doing decorations for that party along with some other people, including Ati. I remember hauling in dead trees into the Dining Hall and painting them all with white and fuchsia stripes [LAUGHS]. It was a good scene. It was beautiful. The party, I've never seen any photographs of that party but that was a great event.

**MEH:** Do you remember if it was for a special occasion, or just the occasion to have a party?

**CF:** I don't think so. As I recall, there was a kind of tradition of having a major costume party each year. Was this during the summer?

**MEH:** I don't know.

**CF:** I don't recall either whether it was summer, or whether it was regular session. I think it was a regular session, not summer session. I think that this party sort of also was very much under the eyesight and point of view of Albers, the two Albers. I think it actually may have been based on something that was done at the Bauhaus, which was to have a party with a very narrow visual theme, rather than the usual – quote – "costume party," in which people get dressed up as wild characters of any kind of this or that or something, which is total chaos visually. This was Albers' version of a costume party, which is to define a very narrow theme [TELEPHONE RINGS AND IRRELEVANT REMARKS].

**CF:** It was, I believe, an idea which I have read at least was done also at the Bauhaus – to define a very narrow visual theme, because only with that as a starting point do you see the creativity of people within that limitation. I think one of the popular ones – this was the theme of that party which we did the decoration for – was checks and stripes. People then produced some variation on that theme, but the whole visual effect of the whole group of people at the party was then an absolute visual feast, because rather than chaos, you had this variations on a theme, which I think proved Albers' point that you only really have something when you have severe limitations and you recognize those limitations and perform within them. That doing anything one “feels like,” which was his frequent accusation, leads only to chaos.

**MEH:** There was another related question I was going to ask you. Oh, a different question. I had a note that when you came back in preparation for Harvard, you took some math and science courses? Did you take a course with Hansgirg?

**CF:** I worked with Hansgirg. I think I took a physics course with him, and I maybe at that time took a mathematical course with Max Dehn. But I worked with Hansgirg.

**MEH:** How was that?

**CF:** He had this concept, heavily supported by Ted Dreier and the whole college, that maybe he could come up with a system of extracting aluminum from olivine, which is a stone that is found in abundance in the mountains of North Carolina. We set up a laboratory in that building that was closest to the lake. I forget what it was before. It was like a garage. It's the first building you'd come

to as you left the Dining Hall and started to walk around the lake. There's a little building on the left, and somehow I lucked into being his assistant to build a laboratory to demonstrate that this could be done. It was great fun. I saw a great deal of him, and we worked pretty much together. I was the only student who was involved with this. I did the construction drawings for an elaborate electrical furnace. He essentially designed it and the concepts. It involved a ceramic chamber up the middle, which was surrounded by heating rods. It had a sophisticated visual gadget that measured the temperature inside through a porthole. It was all constructed out of steel. It was about, as I recall, like two and a half feet in diameter and about four or five feet high. We set up this laboratory to his specifications. I did all the kind of physical work. I mean, it involved a fascinating process of grinding up the olivine stone and combining it with some other powdered chemical components. I don't recall exactly what they were, but we ground up all the material there in this little lab with a little small quantity of equipment. Then this was formed into things that looked like aspirin tablets. We had a tablet machine that was actually a pharmaceutical machine. These tablets were then deposited in the middle of this furnace and then it was raised to a certain temperature and out of the combination of chemicals with the olivine, it deposited aluminum on the surface of the ceramic chamber, to a part of it that was cooled. We produced aluminum [LAUGHS] there. I don't quite recall what happened to it. I think it was a proven pilot plant, in the sense that the process would work, but the analysis of the economics of it obviously didn't pan out, because it never went ahead in any way. He hoped

to get people to invest in it and part of the dream was that it would support Black Mountain College. [LAUGHS] I don't quite remember the period over which we did that, but took quite a while to build this equipment and get it going and to run it. It was a fascinating experience, and I think I also had the hope that maybe it would solve Black Mountain's financial problems. I have a feeling I maybe left about the time. I don't recall the demise of the pilot plant. I think I left to go back to Harvard. Or to go to Harvard. I'm not sure what period that was. I know it was obviously in '45, '46.

**MEH:** What was Hansgirg like as a person?

**CF:** He was very Germanic, I think, and totally out of place at Black Mountain [LAUGHS]. Driving around in his Cadillac and dressed in suits and ties the whole time. I admired his ability, with his background, to come and live at Black Mountain in that situation and endure the kind of radical independence of that place [LAUGHS] and tolerate it with bemusement and some understanding. But just totally, a total radical difference, from the way he grew up and the way his life in Germany, the way his professional life was as a major physicist. I admired his tolerance. We got along very well. We were working together to solve problems, which is what I love to do [LAUGHS], and I enjoyed being part of that thing. We probably had our minor difficulties at some point, but they certainly don't remain in my memory as anything important.

**MEH;** Do you remember any particular socials at his house? Parties at his house?

**CF:** I can remember being there, something, which is probably a transformation of life at Black Mountain.

**MEH:** How do you remember the interior of his house?

**CF:** Well, I think it was like going into another world. [LAUGHS] The general open simplicity of the Black Mountain environment, and then to go into this. I can only recall a kind of overstuffed, over-decorated sort of high-class German interior. I found it oppressive [LAUGHS]. But I really don't think I was there too often. I would say everybody was there once or so.

**MEH:** What about Max Dehn? What was he like?

**CF:** I remember him as a very sweet man, who had a lot of quality behind his sort of mathematical world. But I also don't recall that I was ever very adept at more serious mathematics. I think I did very well in the rest of my life at any kind of calculations, but certainly the mental gymnastics of theoretical mathematics was something I'd never had much experience with. I only recall his class as being beautifully fundamental about mathematical concepts, just talking about the properties of a circle and all of the mathematical implications of it. Some things like that made an impression on me at that time.

**MEH:** Did you work with Molly Gregory?

**CF:** Oh, I did a lot of work in the shop. We were very close. We had a great companionship based on shop instruction. I did a lot of private things there and also helped build a lot of stuff for the college there, too. I did the Jalowetz' house once, with Claude Stoller. I don't know when that was. Do you?

[LAUGHS]

**MEH:** Probably the '41 summer session. I think they were working heavily on that. You were doing a lot of the woodworking stuff?

**CF:** I did a lot of work in the shop, I remember, but on various projects. I remember some private ones. I am curious in the chronology. I was sort of the foreman of remodeling the farmhouse one session. I don't know whether that was during regular year or whether that – I don't think it was a summer session. We added bedrooms in the attic of the farmhouse, and I remember raising the roof in parts with all sorts of improvised techniques which was in itself quite an experience.

**MEH:** Molly was heavily involved in that project.

**CF:** She probably was. I remember that I pretty much did it with a bunch of students. But she probably had some supervision of it or something.

**MEH:** What was Molly like?

**CF:** Well, Molly was a great, great friend to me. She was also a presence at Black Mountain. I think of the Albers and the Dreiers contributing probably a kind of visual world, which to me became Black Mountain – probably not to everybody. But Molly, in her understanding and devotion to the physical world, to the world of not only construction but just appreciation and contact with the physical realities of getting things done, with your hands. She contributed a sort of attitude that I think permeated all of Black Mountain. She was a great friend, because we shared that interest in construction.

**MEH:** Did you work on the farm at all?

**CF:** I never did much work, physically, on the farm in terms of crops or milking or any of that stuff, because I was always involved in something that had to do with carpentry or building or the bulldozer. That was more my area, so I think I always ended up doing that sort of thing. I guess I had some skills in those

areas and it was more useful for me to use them than to – I think of the farm as a place where people without particular skills could still contribute a great deal, with the required labor or something.

**MEH:** Were you there when the Dreier, when Mark Dreier died?

**CF:** No, that was before my time.

**MEH:** That was before.

**CF:** [AFFIRMATIVE]. I think that was only the year before, or something. It was very shortly before, because I think everyone was still stunned. I remember hearing about it.

**MEH:** Did you leave – I don't like to say "the campus" – Lake Eden to go into the surrounding area very much?

**CF:** Oh, I used to walk the mountains a lot. I remember hiking up to the top of those adjoining mountains many times. Getting caught in a lightning storm up there once. [LAUGHS] Feeling the hair rise on my head! [LAUGHS] Up in a pasture, up at the top, a big storm came in, and I remember running down through the grass, barefooted as I remember, and trying to get down off the top and lightning striking around, and feeling the hair rise on my head from the static electricity.

**MEH:** What do you think was the effect of the setting on the college? Of the mountain setting and the college's isolation?

**CF:** Well, that's tough. I still feel that Lee Hall was a better environment for the concept and the ideas that Black Mountain was about. I think Lake Eden was a lovely environment, but I don't recall that a lot of people – students, faculty –



really participated that much in the environment and going on walks and exploring the nature that surrounded that place. I feel like a lot of people just clung to the buildings and maybe felt a bit isolated. I never felt that.

**MEH:** If you were designing a campus for a college of the type that Black Mountain was – a college that was also a community – you would see Lee Hall as a better prototype than Lake Eden?

**CF:** Lee Hall – this incredible singularity of the place contributed, as I said, a great deal. It also was set in an incredible natural environment. In some way the contrast between the two was a strong element. You had this sense of absolute unity of the group, as symbolized functionally, contributed by the building. At the same time you walked off into absolute mountain, nature, and had this fantastic view off the front porch. I never understood the Gropius-Breuer scheme that was done for Lake Eden. I never saw very extensive drawings about what it was, but I only gather from the general looks of the models, the photographs I saw, that it maybe was based on the Lee Hall idea [LAUGHS] and not on the separation of everyone in separate buildings.

**MEH:** Actually, the Kocher building was – I think it was five wings. If it had ever been totally constructed, then it also would have been a more coherent campus.

**CF:** Yes, certainly it would have been. I guess it just symbolized in a sense, with the central stair hall and so on, but I don't recall that had the kind of space that you would need for central areas. I must have known well the plan, because I made some drawings of it for fund raising. I at this point don't think of it as an ideal scheme for Black Mountain. But I would probably favor a building that was

more unified than what Lake Eden was, but the college had to make use of what they found there.

**MEH:** Do you have other particular memories of the college – anecdotes, things we haven't discussed?

**CF:** None jump to mind. I've told you some of the things that to me were some of the most memorable times, like certainly the conflicts there and what they meant in my life. I certainly enjoyed working with Hansgirg, and all the other work stuff that I did was to me a big part of my experience, preparation for architecture.

**MEH:** What were the Dreiers like?

**CF:** Great personal friends. [LAUGHS] I think they were both remarkable people. I saw a lot of them after Black Mountain, because we were together here in New York – used to go up to Schenectady to visit them numerous occasions with our whole family. Saw them on Martha's Vineyard. I think both of them had a touch with people. Bobbie, probably in particular. I know she was close to the Alberses and they had a great influence on her. I think she in her life sort of demonstrated their visual world. They invented at Lake Eden for me and for Ati – for both of us ever since – the celebration of Easter.

**MEH:** How was that?

**CF:** We used to have in their North Lodge or something? No, it wasn't North Lodge. At their place at Lake Eden that they shared with the Alberses.

**MEH:** I can't remember the name of the cottage now.

**CF:** All painted white inside, including most of the floors, as I remember. They started, which was to us a fascinating ritual of Easter, which we will duplicate right here.

**MEH:** That ritual was – ?

**CF:** [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING] [LAUGHS] The celebration of Easter, which had for all of us no great connection to Christianity. It was a celebration of life and of spring in some way. That's where we started painting of Easter eggs. Ati has an incredible collection. For all the years of our marriage, we had elaborate Easter celebrations which were all based on color, flowers, painted eggs which all looked like small Albers paintings [LAUGHS]. You couldn't, again, do something which was dipping eggs in dye. You had to come up with a new composition on the egg form. The Alberses and the Dreiers used to paint eggs and then we would have this Easter breakfast with wonderful food and good company. Usually some other supplementary kind of decoration that made a kind of statement about spring and color. We did this in variations over many, many years and I've done it in my life with Elizabeth. We've done it at Pound Ridge every year, and we'll do it here next week. [LAUGHS] That was a lovely sort of Albers visual celebration dedicated to spring and to some intimations of Easter which I think probably historically had something to do with spring and was usurped, perhaps. [LAUGHS]

**MEH:** You left Black Mountain, and you went to Harvard. Did you go to Harvard as an undergraduate student?

**CF:** No. Only into the graduate school, because Gropius and the War – the School of Design at Harvard, which was the architectural school, offered the possibility of entrance based just on your experience at Black Mountain. Though I didn't graduate from Black Mountain, I had entered the Senior Division, I guess, by the time I left. I never completed graduation. But I was accepted at Harvard as a student in the graduate program. This was because of Gropius and the School of Design recognized that Black Mountain, probably because of Albers, prepared people as well or better than the people they got out of colleges.

**MEH:** How did your experience at Black Mountain serve you in going to Harvard?

**CF:** Well, many, many ways I had what turned out to be probably greater experience in terms of hands-on familiarity with construction than most people who enter architectural school, because I had done endless carpentry on major residential buildings anyhow, and even directed. I also did even architectural planning for some of the remodeling that I eventually executed. I did a couple of other things on the other buildings – lodges – there, altering layouts and stuff like that, for which I did both the planning and the execution. I think this meant a lot to my success at Harvard. Even though I came with less college degree, in a sense, than most people to the Graduate School, I was quickly promoted out of the freshman group into the second year because it was obvious that I knew a lot about what I was doing [LAUGHS] and more so than many of the other people I was with. I think that was the practical experience of Black Mountain. Again, my experience in dealing with the crisis situation at Black Mountain, I think Harvard also involved. Some projects were collaborative projects and I

have ended up having very successful collaborations in the field of architecture all my career. I think that stems from many of those experiences at Black Mountain as to how people can produce something together. Probably the way you can deal, that you avoid those kind of conflicts, that I observed so intimately at Black Mountain.

**MEH:** You graduated from Harvard? Well, another question I had was – was there anything equivalent in the Harvard curriculum at that time to Albers' teaching?

**CF:** I don't think so. I even have some vague feeling they later tried to institute something, or it was considered, or they were trying to promote having people do work in some visual way. Gropius's idea I know was that all people should have some visual experience making things, some creative experience, and some intimate connection with the visual arts, even if they had no intention of going further with it. The architectural school at that point did not have any such program. At Yale they did, I think, where Albers was. Certainly the Institute of Design in Chicago was heavily that way.

**MEH:** When you were at Harvard, were there other Black Mountain students studying architecture?

**CF:** Yes. Claude Stoller. Bill Reed. Don Page. I think I went one year ahead of them, and they came a year later. They were one year behind me.

**MEH:** How do you remember Bill Reed?

**CF:** I knew Bill quite well, as well as anyone could know him perhaps. I think of him as being a unique sort of visually perceptive guy, who lived in a visual world, which I admired enormously. Sweet man. He had an incredibly laid back sort of

personal style that to me was absolutely unique, and a visual touch with the materials – weaving – with any of the visual areas. I always loved to see where he lived and how he lived. He and Don Page both had that. Tragic death at Martha's Vineyard, which I never understood and I don't think anyone does. But it was kind of the way he lived, very, pretty much alone and in his world. But I had great admiration for him. I thought, at Harvard, he was a little bit out of it. I mean, I don't see him as seriously being an architect. I think he's maybe a painter, maybe a weaver. His Quiet House at Lake Eden was a beautifully built thing, which he was very involved in, but I somehow don't see his personality as one that could battle the world of getting things built. But a delightful guy. Don and Bill and I and maybe even Claude, too, although Claude less, saw a lot of each other outside of school, in Harvard days. Socially and –

**MEH:** So you graduated from Harvard? Did you graduate?

**CF:** Yes, yes. I got a degree, and then I got a fellowship to travel in Europe, and did that for over a year. Went to work through the winter months from – first started out bicycling in England, then bicycled in southern France, with Ati, and then went up to Switzerland for Christmas that fall. Started in September. Spent the holidays in Zurich and then I had arranged a job up in Stockholm, Sweden, with the Architectural Office of the Swedish Cooperative. They had their own architectural office that built all their buildings for the cooperative stores. The office also did work outside of the actual work for the cooperative. They were available for private projects. I did most of the drawings for a competition for a community center up in north Sweden the six months that I was there. We

didn't win the competition, but it was fascinating. I worked most of the time on various projects with the cooperative for Hans Asplund, who was the son of the renowned Swedish architect. Asplund – I forget his first name, father. We became great friends. Also after we were in Stockholm in June, we left to go down to Italy and continue traveling in Europe. Hans and his wife came down. We met in Sicily and traveled some together. I saw him a couple of times in New York. I haven't now seen him for many, many years, but he was a great friend.

**MEH:** You were saying at some point – you and Ati were married at this point?

**CF:** Married just before the trip to Europe, yes, the year before.

**MEH:** At some point you were at the Institute of Design?

**CF:** After I came back from the trip to Europe, I had worked for Stubbins. First, I worked for the Architects Collaborative – Gropius's group – some. Then I think when I came back from Europe I worked for a while for Stubbins out in Lexington, Massachusetts where he had his office in the basement of his house. It was when I was there that I got an offer to go to Colorado, where a couple of people I knew – one Bob Van Dusen, from Harvard – was out there working for another Colorado architect in Grand Junction. They had the freedom to do projects. It was very attractive, and I agreed to join them. There were some other great people from Yale who were working for Tom Moore, an architect in Grand Junction. I went out and worked out there for a couple of months before Ati came out. I was assigned a school project down in Durango, Colorado, and designed the school. Another fellow in the office designed

another school for Durango. Then I was transferred down there to set up an office to supervise the schools. So, I worked down in Durango for about a year, and Ati found the environment a little limiting [LAUGHS], which I found, too. She decided to go back to Chicago and go to school, which she did, at the Institute of Design. Then I was hired by Chermayff to come to the Institute of Design and teach as an associate in the Shelter Design Department. I spent a couple of years there.

**MEH:** [INTERRUPTION]

**[END OF VIDEOCASSETTE 2, BEGINNING OF VIDEOCASSETTE 3]**

**MEH:** By the time you were at the Institute of Design, Moholy had died, is that right?

**CF:** Oh, yes. [AFFIRMATIVE] Chermayff hired me to teach, when I was still in Colorado, and it worked out well because Ati was already there in Chicago, going to school at the Institute. We got an apartment there. But Chermayff had left by the time I got there. He hired me during the summer, and I arrived in the fall. He'd already left and Crombie Taylor, who was the temporary head and remained that way during the entire time I was there.

**MEH:** What were you teaching?

**CF:** I taught the classic Introduction to Architecture at the Institute of Design. I don't recall whether everybody took that class. I mean it was formulated before I got there and was called "The Basic House Design," or "The Primitive House Design Problem." It was a fascinating, very instructive thing for anybody who is going to go into the design world – to say nothing about architecture – because the general limits of the problem were that you design a shelter for a climactic



[SIC] location somewhere in the world, of your choice, but you had to do research to come up with the available materials at this site and the topography, particularly an intimate picture of the environment – physical environment – and the possible materials and techniques that could be used to build a simple shelter. It was a shelter, not a residence [LAUGHS], and there was generally the idea of a small survivable example of shelter in a particular specific. Of great interest was that it was, in many cases, an extreme location, or I mean it had unique climactic [SIC] qualities. In a sense the whole class was a very excellent instruction on the influence of the environment and materials on architectural form. Fundamental to good architecture and to the solution of the problems of a resident and the elimination of any concept of style [LAUGHS]. This typified the Institute of Design in all areas, because even in the areas of product design, it was allergic to the word "style," because it felt there was no style. There was only the solution to a problem in terms of need and in terms of materials and techniques for developing a form to meet that need and which would express and utilize to the maximum the possible available techniques and materials. That permeated the whole design school and led eventually to my leaving there because to replace Chermayeff and the acting director, they decided under Illinois Tech at that time that they would bring in somebody from the Detroit design scene – Jay Doblin, as I remember. He was at some time in his career – I'm not sure right at the point they hired him – a stylist for General Motors [LAUGHS]. A group of the faculty took great exception to this switch in what they felt again was a denial of the very basic

ideas that the Institute was based on. Here we had another conflict situation. I was very, again, very close to a number of people. Hugo Weber, painter; Aaron Siskind, photographer; Callahan, photographer; Arthur Siegel.

**MEH:** It's funny that those three were all at Black Mountain one summer together. They came from the (OVERTALK)

**CF:** Not while I was there.

**MEH:** No, the summer of '50 ['51].

**CF:** I think I was aware of that.

**MEH:** Was Buckminster Fuller there while you were there?

**CF:** He came by once, yes, I think, and lectured. I also met him privately a couple of times.

**MEH:** How would you compare the learning experience at Black Mountain with the learning experience at the Institute of Design, or IT, as it became?

**CF:** Well, they were quite different in their intent. I mean, the Institute of Design was a highly specialized design school. The processes had great similarity, and certainly they both came from the same place, which was the Bauhaus. As demonstrated in the primitive house problem, the whole approach of understanding your materials and understanding the needs of any design problem were fundamental to that place. It was carried to a degree of detail in all areas of design at the Institute of Design. At Black Mountain it only applied in certain areas. The principles maybe carried over into many areas.

**MEH:** Your later work has been architectural, because probably we should – that is really documented in other ways, is that true?

**CF:** Yes. Some of my work has been published, but my hope is that I will document it much better. That's actually my coming project.

**MEH:** But you've worked basically in both commercial and residential architecture.

**CF:** Not much in commercial. I've also done a lot of other types of work. My Black Mountain beginnings, I think, prejudiced me towards being in a kind of work where I can participate deeply in the actual realization of a thing. I've done a lot of institutional exhibition work for the government, overseas and in this country, and got involved in the whole redesign of Pan American Airways, designing airplane interiors, along with my partner for most of those years, Don Davidson, a Canadian who's now gone back to Canada. But he was a student at the Institute of Design, a student of mine in a mechanical drawing class [LAUGHS]. We met there and worked together for thirty years or something. But my work has been quite varied and to me we've done a lot of wild and interesting projects, most all of it based on the very things I've just been talking about. We did not make designs. We made conceptions of how to solve some problems and how to build. In many cases we actually built it. Or we participated in the building and assembly of most of the exhibitions we did. We did a prefab traveling exhibition for the U.S.I.A., a whole show on American tools We invented a lot of exhibition techniques, and even designed the packing for it. It traveled around Europe, won some prizes in Yugoslavia and in Russia. It was one of the exchange exhibitions with the International Art Program. No it wasn't. It was the U.S.I.A. exchange program with Russia, of exhibitions. I have a lot of records in the form of slides and drawings and publications, and I hope to sort

of assemble a kind of collage-scrapbook of all these projects. Maybe put some of it on videotape.

**MEH:** You should really do a CD, which you could do with (OVERTALK)

**CF:** Yes, I probably could. I like the idea of being able to assemble visual evidence and also write some of my recollections that will come when I start that process, I hope, of getting some of these things done and the way we did it. That could perhaps be another big undertaking, to translate it into video, but I think of that.

**[END OF INTERVIEW; END OF TRANSCRIPT]**