

Interviewee: RUTH 'PEG' BARTON FRENCH
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
Location: Dublin, New Hampshire
Date: August 21, 1997
Media: (8/21/1997) Audio tapes (2) (3 Sides)
Video tapes (1)
Interview no.: 3
Transcription: Mary Emma Harris, July 1998; corrected with minor revisions
August 2013. Converted from Word Perfect, August 2013

[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW. BEGINNING OF TRANSCRIPT.]

MEH: How did you come to be at Black Mountain College?

PBF: I came there because I had a cousin who was there, Sydney Carter. Sydney Carter was having a sort of house party. His family farm accommodated lots of people, and they were having a big party. So, I was invited to come over — it was not far from Peterborough — to come over and join them for a swim and a cookout and all that and meet some of the Black Mountain people, which I did. There were approximately ten or twelve Black Mountain people there. So, I went to meet people like John Evarts, the music man, and Nat French, who became my future husband. I had a really marvelous opportunity to find out — a little bit — what it was all about. I had been for a year to Bennington College. I got kicked out of it because I didn't do my homework. I was too enamored by the whole business of being away from home, meeting some wonderful gals, some very bright gals. The whole thing. I just didn't do my homework although I was interested in the things I was taking. It just didn't work out, and I'm awfully glad I was fired because then I had a chance to go to Black Mountain.

MEH: Where are you from?

PBF: Just outside of Boston. Chestnut Hill.

MEH: Was your elementary school — Did you go to progressive schools?

PBF: I went to two private schools. The one first through sixth was a very old private school, and the second one — sixth through graduation — was Beaver Country Day which was at that time, quite progressive, I think.

MEH: The Baileys weren't associated with Beaver, were they?

PBF: Yes. I think Ruthie. It's either Beaver or the Cambridge School in Weston.

MEH: Maybe the Cambridge School.

PBF: It may have been both. The Cambridge School in Weston was my father-in-law. He was the headmaster.

MEH: Right. We'll talk about that because I want —

PBF: So, I did know Ruthie Bailey but I'm not sure if it was at Beaver.

MEH: Did your parents have any reservations about your going down to Black Mountain?

PBF: Not a bit.

MEH: What did your father do?

PBF: Well, he was dead at that point. He was a lawyer.

MEH: But, obviously there was interest in the family in progressive education.

PBF: No, I was the only one to go to college. As a matter of fact, I was the only one out of four girls to have graduated from high school. The others all went to boarding schools and finishing schools or to Europe for the last year.

MEH: That's interesting.

PBF: And I was the only one that actually got a diploma.

MEH: Was that an acceptable thing to do then?

PBF: Yes, it was definitely acceptable, but it was not usual.

MEH: I mean, what your sisters did or what you did?

PBF: What my sisters did.

MEH: Was unusual but acceptable.

PBF: Oh, yes. The coming out business and all of that. I didn't want to be a participant in that at all.

MEH: So, you went to Black Mountain.

PBF: So, I went to Black Mountain. But I didn't go to Black Mountain, I think, with any preconceived notions of what it represented educationally or anything else. I just — It just looked like a good place to learn to grow up — or to learn and to grow up.

MEH: Do you remember how you got there the first time?

PBF: Uh-huh (POSITIVE). I rode down from New York with Robert Hillard [???] and John somebody-or-other, a blond. We arrived at Black Mountain College about midnight or one o'clock, and it was the spookiest, eeriest entrance because here was that great Lee Hall. Have you ever seen it? You've seen pictures of it certainly. All dark except for one dim light and the doors, of course, were wide open and around it in various spots were these columns with heads, busts of famous people and just enough light to see all these busts. It was the most eerie place. Somebody was apparently expecting us because somebody did take me sort of in the dark up to the room where I was going to be sharing a bed or a room anyway. I walked in and didn't turn on any light. This voice said,

"I'm your roommate but let's not meet until tomorrow morning." And I said, "Fine." So I got into bed and went to sleep, and when we woke in the morning, it was Mary Beaman. But it was a very strange introduction, a very strange way to enter a college for the first time.

MEH: How did you apply?

PBF: I don't remember.

MEH: What was the application process? Do you remember?

PBF: I don't remember.

MEH: Did you have any idea what you wanted to study? Any special interests.

PBF: Yes, I was very interested in architecture, stage design. When I first went to Bennington, I had just come fresh from my class with some MIT students in building a glider. I have always loved to make things, build things, and I think that's why my interest in architecture and stage design. Because it involved construction. I've always loved tools and that sort of thing. At Bennington, I had decided that I wanted to learn how to play the flute. Otto Leuning was at Bennington then, and he was not only a composer but a fine flutist. So, I thought, "Ha" but he wouldn't have anything to do with me at all because I didn't know how to read music. But, when I got to Black Mountain, I had my flute with me and a self-instruction book, and I was encouraged to do every single thing I could possibly do. I ended up playing *Brandenburg Concertos* and all kinds of things. So the whole approach to it was so different at Black Mountain. I was sort of persuaded, "Sure, give it a try." Whereas at Bennington, with that

particular thing, "Absolutely not. You do not know the fundamentals, and we're not going to waste time with you." That's a crude way to put it.

MEH: And so who encouraged you? Did Evarts encourage you or —?

PBF: I don't know.

MEH: Did you take instruction with anyone or did you just — ?

PBF: No, because there was no one there to have instruction with. I really didn't have it until after I got married and got some lessons then.

MEH: What classes did you take?

PBF: I took Mr. Rice's Plato.

MEH: What do you remember about that?

PBF: I remember being scared to death by John Andrew Rice. I remember thinking — at times — that there was an awful lot of time and energy put into not just semantics but just word ideas that couldn't be applied to anything in particular. It was just — I don't know the word to use to describe it. But it was very interesting because you could see the minds working. I'm sure I wasn't a participant. But I did enjoy trying to latch on to some. I took music courses from John Evarts and Allan Sly, and I was fascinated with that. That stuck, too. I took a philosophy course with — I don't remember who. I took a Physics of Sound course with Ted Dreier, which was great fun. Very interesting. I look at the book I had now, and I think, "How did I every understand that kind of stuff." I was there three years so I must have taken other courses.

MEH: Did you graduate from Black Mountain?

PBF: No. I didn't plan to graduate. I knew what the provisions were for graduating, which were pretty terrific. You graduated there really as a M.A., not a B.A. [BMC in the 1930s gave a certificate of graduation. It did not give degrees. Mary Emma Harris] So, I didn't plan to. Then, besides, I met Nat French, who was in his last year there. He didn't graduate until, oh, approximately three, four, five years after he left.

MEH: Did he graduate from Black Mountain?

PBF: Uh-huh (POSITIVE). And the examiners were somebody from Harvard and somebody from — I've forgotten where. Anyway, they were pretty stiff.

MEH: What do you remember about Evarts?

PBF: Very pleasant kinds of things. He was lots of fun. He provided a great deal of levity for situations. Not that it was necessarily limited to — He had a wonderful ability to improvise on the piano. He always played all Saturday evenings for dancing. The gals all dressed up and the boys put on ties and we had this fancy ball room dancing kind of thing. It was great fun. I still remember dancing with Bill Reed, who was just a wonderful waltzer. But, anyway, John Evarts was always there to provide a lot of fun, and just a nice guy. I saw him a number of times afterwards. I don't know if it was at the Dreiers up in the Adirondacks. I never was vastly impressed with his musical abilities. But he had something that was very valuable.

MEH: What course did he teach?

PBF: I think it was sort of music appreciation. But, again, encouraged us to — There were a lot of recordings that he played, too, I remember. I think it was sort of music history.

MEH: What about Allan Sly?

PBF: Allan Sly was a funny little fellow. I don't remember whether I actually took a course with him. But one of the things he introduced was English country dancing, with the pipe and the tabor, the tabor being the little drum, and the pipe, the three penny. He taught any of us who were interested to make these bamboo pipes like recorders. Only you make them out of bamboo, and we had quartets of bamboo pipes. We gave a concert one night. Needless to say, the audience couldn't stop laughing. I mean, everybody thought it was so comical. We were quite serious. That was a great source of fun and play. But also we learned. We learned how to tune. You learned why the placement of holes — are placed that way or the size of the holes. So, actually physics as well as — And, again, I love to make things.

MEH: Now, explain to me more the English country dancing. The bamboo pipe and the —

PBF: The pipe, I think, is more like a penny whistle, and they used it for the little tunes for the dancers. You know, country dancing.

MEH: And the drum —

PBF: Yes, to pound out the rhythm. The drum was a little bitty thing.

MEH: Did one person play both instruments?

PBF: Yes, one person played both instruments. Allan was very knowledgeable. I think maybe he did teach us the history. Because he knew lots of composers and he was a fine pianist, a really fine concert pianist. So, he was a great addition in a funny little way.

MEH: Did you leave before Jalowetz came?

PBF: Yes, in fact, I don't remember when Mr. Rice left.

MEH: When did you leave?

PBF: I was there from '35 to '38 — June '38.

MEH: I think he left about '39, just after you left.

PBF: I think so.

MEH: Did you take any of Albers' courses?

PBF: Albers?

MEH: Yes.

PBF: Didn't I say that? Yes, always. Everybody took Albers' courses. Oh, I can remember them well.

MEH: What do you remember?

PBF: Oh, I remember some of the words he always used like "motoric feeling," how you must look at a thing and draw what you see, not what you know. Oh, he was a very wise man, I think. And his abilities to encourage people. As I say, I think everybody took those courses. We would draw tops of bottles for hours. We would do lettering and learning how to space, the writing space. We would do figure drawing and all kinds of things. He always could generate this interest and encouragement and it was just sort of a way of life. They were wonderful.

His wife Anni — I don't remember her ever teaching any courses. She didn't speak— well, yes, I was going to say she didn't speak English quite as well as he did. Is she still alive? Do you know?

MEH: No, she died two or three years ago.

PBF: Because she was quite elderly. And, Mr. Albers also had very definite opinions about thing.

MEH: Do you mean with respect to the community?

PBF: Oh, yes. With respect to most anything. And that's good.

MEH: Do you remember any of those in particular?

PBF: No, not really.

MEH: Or how he expressed them.

PBF: No, I just remember that I had the feeling that Mr. Rice was a powerhouse but so was Josef Albers a powerhouse, but in totally different ways. But a man to be held in great respect and liking. Yes, that was a wonderful experience. I don't think most of us had any idea of becoming artists. It was just to learn. Somebody who was so full of this kind of thing can teach you, and you can relate to that to other things or whatever. It was just a marvelous opportunity to see and partake in that kind of thing. Yes, I found it very rewarding.

MEH: Do you remember his *matière* exercises? Working with materials.

PBF: No, I don't think so. Working with materials?

MEH: Building collages with different types of materials to fool the eye.

PBF: No, I don't remember anything like that.

MEH: Where did he hold his classes at Lee Hall?

PBF: Well, some of the bigger classes like portrait — figure things — were right out in Lee Hall. I mean, the place was empty in the day time. It was a passageway. There were chairs all around. So, you could use it for whatever. Most of the classes were in a smaller room with a blackboard. Mostly in that room where the blackboard was so that he could illustrate a point that he was making.

MEH: What about his English?

PBF: Well, it was kind of unique. But that puts a new slant on things at some times. And it was kind of fun. But he was deeply involved, I think, in the whole process of community and the importance of it and the different aspects of it.

MEH: Did you do any work in theater?

PBF: Not of my own volition. But one of the things that happened — and I was aware that it had happened to several other people — was to put them in a dramatic production and make them behave in a way that they would not naturally do it. I was put in — I can't think of the name of it — one of Shaw's — not *Pygmalion* — it's a famous play. Anyway, the role I had to play was so unlike me.

MEH: How was that?

PBF: Well, in the first place, to get up on stage and bear my soul was not like me. I was very close-mouthed, stiff-upper-lip kind of approach which was what I was taught growing up.

MEH: What was the role like that you — ?

PBF: If I could just think of the name of it. The principal role was the title of the play. I'm stumped. Anyway, it had a very therapeutic effect, and I think that is why it was done is to help me see myself and to make me be demonstrative about

throwing my arms around Duncan Dwight's neck even though it would be the last thing in the world I would want to do actually because that part in the play required it. But I was encouraged and made to do these things that were not part of my nature at all. I think it helped — it really did help me to open up a little bit, to learn to be less stuffy, I don't know, less reserved. So, I was in several plays. The *Warrior's Husband* I was in. I'll think of the name of this other one. But anyway, I did get involved in dramatics from that point of view. But I was told that they wanted me to play that part.

MEH: Was Bob Wuncsh doing the directing?

PBF: Uh-huh (POSITIVE).

MEH: What do you remember about his way of teaching and directing students?

PBF: Not much. I don't. I can't remember whether I took a literature course with him or not. I sort of think I did. He was a funny little man. Very nice. I liked him. But I don't remember anything particularly outstanding about his teaching method. I felt so sorry for him when he was — Oh, that's so unfortunate. But anyway.

MEH: Did you work with Schawinsky at all when he was there on his dramatics productions?

PBF: No, not really. Not specifically. But there were so many things that we did. Because during the three years I was there, the student enrollment never exceeded fifty-five students. So the things we did, we undertook as a sort of community thing. My memories of the place pretty much all seem to concern themselves with groups of people or twos or threes or fours. But I don't remember any courses in acting. I remember him very well and his wife.

MEH: What do you remember about him?

PBF: Just a big slightly macho male with lots of ideas, a loud voice, enthusiastic. Sort of a big little boy. Nothing really specific.

MEH: Was Erwin Straus there when you were there?

PBF: No.

MEH: Was Moellenhoff teaching psychology?

PBF: Uh-huh (POSITIVE).

MEH: Did you take any psychology courses?

PBF: No. I liked Mrs. Moellenhoff. But Dr. Moellenhoff sort of — I mean, I don't know what it was. I remember feeling slightly put off by him. No, I never did take anything with him.

MEH: What were your general impressions of the college at the time? I mean, if you had to describe the college at the time, how would you describe it?

PBF: It's a hard question to answer. I think I thought of it as my good fortune in being with a group of people who were trying to learn a whole lot of different things and sort of doing it together. There was very much a feeling of, I thought, community. They didn't have to put up signs with rules on them. It sort of found its way. It was understood that such-and-such a practice was not condoned and such-and-such a practice was encouraged. Yes, we always did put on skirts for supper or shirt and ties for boys or whatever. I remember it as a big sort of extended family. I don't know what you call it. Because it wasn't a very large group, after all. We were all in this one building. You did have your own study. You always shared a bedroom with somebody else. So, you did have privacy.

You could shut your door and put a “Do Not Disturb” sign on it, which was a good arrangement, I thought. Not that you could put a sign on it but that you had your one place where you could call your own, so to speak, whereas your bedroom was shared. That was a good arrangement. No, I never had any chance to live like that. It was pretty bare. Lee Hall had nothing very glamorous about it. But it was big and it was space and it had water and the dining room had some wonderful cooks. It had everything you needed and lovely walks in the woods afterwards if you wanted to. The farm to help with if you wanted to. And we started a little orchestra. In fact, that’s — I think one of the — I think there’s a picture of me in your book. I remember that little orchestra out on the porch of Lee Hall. I dread to think what it — I mean it fills me with horror to think what it sounded like. It was another example of just having fun trying to do it together.

MEH: Do you remember who organized it?

PBF: No.

MEH: Did you give concerts?

PBF: Oh, no. We weren’t that good.

MEH: Not even for the college?

PBF: No. Oh, all these concerts would be just for the college. No, we did give some concerts, but not with that particular group. It probably was Allan Sly that did the arranging. Because he would take a part that was for a clarinet and fix it for the trombone or whatever — I mean there were only about eight or nine instruments. But that was fun.

I thought of Black Mountain mostly as a place, well, to grow up I suppose and to help decide what some of my interests were. The music has very definitely kept on, and I never did go into architecture. But I'm still a frustrated architect. Stage design. That was just part of architecture.

MEH: What did you do for entertainment? You were pretty isolated there.

PBF: Oh, heavens. I don't think that ever entered anybody's head. There again there were enough creative people who could in the spur of the moment form this little band. We tried earnestly to play good music, but we also had a wrong instruments quartet. Everybody who played something chose either a violin or a viola or a cello. We tried to play the Beethoven *Quartets*. [Videotape only section begins] Needless to say, it was pretty slow stuff and unrecognizable. But I played the cello and you can spend the whole evening.... [Videotape only section ends]

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION ON TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

[SIDE 2 BEGINS]

PBF: You could spend the whole evening, you know, laughing hysterically because it was so comical or you could really be quite earnest. I don't remember anything like movies and I don't remember anybody desperate to get out of there, so to speak. I really don't know what we did in the evening particularly.

MEH: Do you remember any parties?

PBF: Yes, occasionally. In people's rooms — in people's studies. But there were not very many. The studies were pretty small. Saturday night we always had a party in Lee Hall — dancing. But I don't remember anything that involved food

or anything like that. It was a really very simple life and simple pleasures. But I don't ever remember craving to go somewhere. We did occasionally go to Asheville. Some of the students had cars.

MEH: Did you — What did you do when you went into Asheville?

PBF: What did I what?

MEH: Do when you went into Asheville? Why would you go into Asheville?

PBF: Oh, well, there was some garden that we went in to inspect, I think. There was some house that was —

MEH: Biltmore House, maybe.

PBF: Yes, something like that. I really don't recall. Then occasionally to a doctor or a dentist or something like that that the little town of Black Mountain couldn't provide. I don't remember being really familiar with Asheville or the town of Black Mountain, except that is where my desk came from. That's the Black Mountain desk.

MEH: Oh, that's right. It sure is.

PBF: That's been in active use since 1935. So that's why it's pretty dirty and pretty crummy looking.

MEH: It's wonderful. What do you remember about the Black Mountain desk, about how it was put together?

PBF: You bought it

MEH: You bought it.

PBF: Yes, I didn't make it.

MEH: From whom?

PBF: There was a carpenter, a local carpenter. As I recall it, they cost twelve dollars. And it was unvarnished or unfinished. It comes apart very easily. The top is not fastened on. So it folds and packs very easy. But that literally has been in active use. I gave it to my son to use for a while.

MEH: [IRRELEVANT CHITCHAT] So it's really made of three pieces: one with drawers, one with shelves and the top.

PBF: Yes, right.

MEH: I think the person who made this in the village was named Edward Dupuy. He was a local carpenter. But, I think it was designed by Albers, or maybe Georgia. Because they had to take it apart every year and put it in the — be able to store it in the summer when the college closed so that YWCA people could come in —

PBF: Oh, yes, yes.

MEH: If I remember correctly.

PBF: That makes sense.

MEH: It's one of the survivors.

PBF: Uh-huh (POSITIVE). Oh, it's good for another hundred years, too.

MEH: I think so. Exactly, at least. I could clean it up very nicely. The glass top was not part of the original. When I gave it to my son to have in his room. I gave him a present of the glass top. I refinished the desk and made it all — But it's pretty untidy now. But it still works.

MEH: Good. Do you remember any people who came to visit the college? Lecturers, musicians.

PBF: I remember Thomas Whitney Surette.

MEH: What do you remember about him?

PBF: Because I went to his summer conference — summer music school for two summers.

MEH: That was in Concord.

PBF: Yes.

MEH: What was that like? What do you remember about it?

PBF: Oh, it was wonderful. I can't remember whether it was three weeks or two weeks, but you lived somewhere around the area as a boarder with the local people, and then you went to classes in the morning and maybe afternoons. There was chorus and orchestra and instrumental instruction. Quite a large group of people — quite a large group. I think, in the evenings we did something. But it was mostly just sort of a — I don't know how to describe it. I've never been to anything quite like it. The people involved in it, of course, were all very highly thought of musicians and/or arrangers like Mr. Surette and various Harvard professors. And it was just quite fun. And we gave performances of oratorios and things of that kind. I loved it. I just loved it.

MEH: Was it while you were at Black Mountain that you did this?

PBF: Yes, it must have been. Because I remember going one summer and flashing my engagement ring. I was very ostentatious in putting it where everybody could see it. And that was — I was engaged to Nat French after he had left but before I finished.

MEH: Were both of you at Black Mountain at the same time? Did you overlap?

PBF: We were there for one year at the same time.

MEH: And then he left —

PBF: And then he left to go to Baltimore and took up his career in teaching with Hans Froelicher and his school there in Baltimore. I would see him during vacations. And in the summertime I — no, that wasn't true. I was going to say in the summertime. He was involved in his camp, his mother — the children's camp that his mother founded.

MEH: I'm trying to straighten out the French and the Bailey families in all of this. Ok. What was the camp that his mother founded?

PBF: It was Alamoosook Island camp.

MEH: Spell Alamoosook.

PBF: A-l-a-m-o-o-s-o-o-k. Alamoosook.

MEH: Was this in Maine?

PBF: It's in Maine. It's where the Penobscot River comes down into the bay at Bucksport.

MEH: And what was this camp like? I mean, was it — ?

PBF: Very unique. Very small. Very unique coeducational. Nine to thirteen and about twenty-five children lived in tents and cabins. The camp was on an island and there was almost no schedule. Just bedtimes, nap times, rest times and mealtimes. Other than that, if you didn't want to do this, you could rip down to the beach and throw pebbles in the water. Or if you wanted to build a submarine, then you could go work in the shop and build your submarine to your heart's content. Or if you wanted to work in the studio. Or if you wanted to

go up to the local field and pick some flowers for the table. There were always counselors there to do these things. But no required times for anything. It was very unique. The counselor-camper ratio was two to one which is pretty unusual. It was run like a town meeting. At the very outset you were elected to, for example, the navigation committee which meant that you were in charge of making sure boats were properly tied or —

MEH: You are talking about the children — the campers — or the grownups.

PBF: The children.

MEH: The children. Ok.

PBF: The whole thing was governed and run by the children. It was very unique. Nat was always involved with that, and when we were married, I was, too.

MEH: What was his mother's name?

PBF: Eleanor French. Mrs. John R.P. Her husband had been — no, was then — the headmaster of the Cambridge School.

MEH: Was he founder of the Cambridge School?

PBF: Well, he was founder of it in that form, under that name. But the school itself was, I think, called — I'm not sure about this but I think it was called the Cambridge School, and it was in Cambridge. And that, as a body, I think, moved out to Weston. And he became the headmaster. He was at Hingham. He ran that school in Hingham. He came there —

MEH: What was the school in Hingham?

PBF: In Hingham?

MEH: Was it a private school?

PBF: Yes. Nat went there.

MEH: And so then — The Cambridge School was in Cambridge and then moved out to Weston. The Cambridge School was a private school?

PBF: Uh-huh (POSITIVE).

MEH: For what ages?

PBF: I think, high school.

MEH: Was it distinguished in any way?

PBF: I don't really know anything about it.

MEH: But John R.P. French, Sr. was headmaster there. And then there was Nathaniel, Caroline and John.

PBF: And John Jr. or Jack — yes.

MEH: And there were only three children. And all three of them went to Black Mountain.

PBF: Yes. Jack wasn't — Yes.

MEH: Which was the oldest?

PBF: Nat. And Nat was one of the originals from Rollins.

MEH: Ok.

PBF: All three children got polio and the recommendations were for Nat that he probably would never walk again but to go south where he wouldn't have to contend with cold so he went to Rollins. And became deeply involved in the whole setup there and was one of the people who rebelled and came and founded Black Mountain College.

MEH: And he did regain use of his legs?

PBF: Oh, my, yes. He — not only that but when we marched down the aisle in 1938, he didn't have a cane or braces or anything. That didn't last too long. He began to get heavy. Oh, yes.

MEH: At Black Mountain did he use a cane or braces?

PBF: Uh-huh (POSITIVE). He had two great big iron braces and, I mean, iron and crutches. But he gradually —

MEH: How old was he when he had the polio?

PBF: Second year in college, whatever that was —

MEH: Then he went down to Rollins.

PBF: After he was sufficiently recovered. And I don't know how long he was at Rollins. He was second year at Harvard when he got the polio. And they all three got it at once. And so my mother-in-law, being a very enterprising woman, bought an old ambulance, fitted it up, and she would take the children every day to Weston into the children's hospital. See this was before Sister Kenny came along and changed the whole approach to the care of polio.

MEH: I remember as a child the polio scare. And actually my sister had non-paralytic polio. But I don't really know much about the treatment.

PBF: Well, there was quite a change. And they all went to Warm Springs, too. And my sister-in-law Caroline has the honor of having President Roosevelt throw a ball to her and having it hit her on the head. And so she always used to go around saying, "The president of the United States hit me on the head with a ball once."

MEH: Did the other children recover? Did Caroline and John recover from the polio?

PBF: No, Caroline didn't. Caroline was quite badly crippled. And so was Nat. But —

MEH: Was she on crutches at Black Mountain?

PBF: No, I think she — It's funny I don't really remember her at Black Mountain. I know she was there. And I don't think Jack was there as a student when I was. But he — Yes, he shook it all off except what he called his partially paralyzed pallet. But you would never know he had polio. Nat did pretty well.

MEH: He left Black Mountain, you said, to work with Froelicher.

PBF: Yes, to teach in the school.

MEH: What was — was it the Froelicher — what was the name of the school?

PBF: Well, five minutes ago I could have told you.

MEH: It'll come back. In Philadelphia, did you say?

PBF: No, Baltimore.

MEH: In Baltimore.

PBF: And he lived just outside of Baltimore with another couple that he got to know. I used to stop there on my way north for vacations.

MEH: What did Nat do professionally?

PBF: He was a teacher. American history was his special field, but he also taught social studies and I don't think he taught any math courses. I think it was social studies and history in general and so forth. And then he became the headmaster of North Shore Country Day School in Winnetka.

MEH: In Winnetka, ok. So, you lived in Illinois.

PBF: Uh-huh (POSITIVE). We lived in Winnetka for thirty years.

MEH: For thirty years. Quite a few people had gone down to Black Mountain from the North —

PBF: From the North?

MEH: No, from the North Shore County Day School, is that right? Had the Sieck girls gone there?

PBF: Yes. They were there when I was.

MEH: At Black Mountain.

PBF: Uh-huh (POSITIVE).

MEH: Right. Yes, I know — [I didn't mean] he sent the kids down. And then there was someone later Paul Williams, who went down.

PBF: Yes.

MEH: Is that were Paul Williams was a student? I think he was.

PBF: I think so, too. I had forgotten that. Yes, the Siecks were very good friends of ours, not the children, but the parents.

MEH: Do you know what either of the girls did? There was Barbara, who married Derek Bovington, who was killed in the war. And then Katie Sieck.

PBF: Katie was — I think she was a roommate of mine for a while at college. I never got along very well with Katie Sieck. Was there another one, too? Miriam, yes.

MEH: Barbara, I think.

PBF: I don't know. I have no idea what happened, what they did.

MEH: No. And, so, did Nat retire from there or did he work elsewhere after he left?

PBF: Well, we got a divorce.

MEH: Oh, I didn't know that.

PBF: Yes, and another gal came into the picture. And part of the agreement that I insisted on was that we both leave town. So, he — we got a divorce and a week later he was married to Edie and took a job at New Mass in Amherst. And I came east to live with my sister who at that time was living in Peterborough. No, she had just moved to Dublin. So that's how I got this plot here. Because she owned this whole six acres with no houses on it. I lived with her for four years. Then it became evident that we'd do better apart. Just because she's a blood relation doesn't mean — I mean we agreed on all the fundamental things. But we just flew on different beams.

MEH: I have three sisters that I get along well with but I wouldn't want to live with them.

PBF: Yes, and she earnestly tried to share what our mother called — what our mother described as an essential for every woman, which is to have her own kitchen sink. I remember it as a kitchen sink, but my sister Em remembers it as a garbage pail. Anyway, she tried earnestly to make it our sink, but it doesn't work. So she gave me half of this six acres, and I built this little package. So, I've been here for twenty-five years now, and I love it. It's not fancy but I love it.

MEH: What — had you worked when you were in Winnetka?

PBF: No.

MEH: You had how many children?

PBF: Well, we had two of our own. Two nephews of mine who were orphaned at age nine and eleven from Portland, Maine, and so we took them on. We didn't adopt them, but I was their guardian, and they lived with us until they went off to

college or either took off on their own or got married or something. So, we had, for all practical purposes, four children.

MEH: You had two sons or a son and a daughter?

PBF: A son and a daughter. And my daughter died about three years ago, and I just have a son and he lives in New Jersey.

MEH: Did you work after you moved back here?

PBF: No, I got involved in all kinds of things but not any paid work. I got involved in music things. Getting young audiences and things like that to go up to the schools and getting small groups to go to the elementary schools. I was the one carried the thermoses and sandwiches and made the arrangements. They did the playing. It was great fun. But just things of that kind. I didn't know a single soul when I came here. I knew exactly two people. But I had a flute. The first thing I did was to join the local choral society to meet some people and that's all it took. I met so many people. I never knew their last names, but I got so involved with people and it was a wonderful way to enter a new community.

MEH: So your flute at Black Mountain became —

PBF: Oh, it was very valuable, very valuable.

MEH: Really valuable.

PBF: Sure, it led me into all kinds of situations.

MEH: Was there a chorus at Black Mountain?

PBF: Oh, I'm sure there was. I don't recall it.

MEH: You weren't in it.

PBF: We tried everything. Never mind that there were only a few people at it.

MEH: What do you remember about mealtimes at Black Mountain?

PBF: I remember their being very good. I remember the kitchen. Rubye and —

MEH: Jack.

PBF: — Jack — a wonderful couple. And I remember the food being very good. And you sort of sat where you wanted to sit. And, I mean, it was very informal. It was very nice. And the faculty and students always mixed up together. There was never any faculty tables and that sort of formality. And there was always dancing. John Evarts would get up at some point after most of the meal was finished and people would get up and dance if they wanted to. A sort of attempt at a little formality in that, as I said before, the girls were always required to wear skirts and the boys a shirt and tie. But other than that it was just sort of expected that you would behave, perhaps, a little different. And I think it worked. But they were always very pleasant, I remember.

MEH: Lake Eden had not been purchased when you were there?

PBF: Yes.

MEH: It had been purchased.

PBF: Well, I remember going over there working. I remember chopping down — I remember wielding a mighty axe and chopping down trees. We were clearing something, but I really don't recall buildings. There certainly were not new buildings. There was some sort of a building there. I think it was purchased or certainly it was made very evident that that is where the college was going to move. It was just a matter of time to accumulate the where-with-all to make the move. But it was mostly a sort of afternoons recreation and exertion sort of to

help get ready. I've never seen Lake Eden, and I just can't imagine Black Mountain in anything but that great big Lee Hall somehow.

MEH: How do you think — what effect to you think that everyone being in the same building had on the community?

PBF: Oh, very good effect.

MEH: Can you be more specific?

PBF: Well, not really. I would think that if people were in different houses, it might be very easy to fall into little cliques or to evaluate this house as being a more popular than that house or this house gave better parties. There was no possibility of anything like that at Lee Hall because we were all there together. We all used the same bathroom. I mean, the boys did have a floor and the girls had a floor. But there was so much togetherness that I don't think you could afford — there was no opportunity to form little groups. So, I think it was good. Perhaps, that's just trying to make the most of adversity, but, no, I think it really had a very positive effect on it. If I was building a college, I don't know whether I — how I would resolve that. But it was such a small group. There was no question of about different dining rooms or different meeting rooms or things like that. It was all together.

MEH: Do you remember anything about any of the conflicts at the college? Were you aware of those or involved in them?

PBF: I don't think so. No. Not really. I was aware of Mr. Rice's indiscretions with Jane Mayhall and the beginning of some of his troubles because she had the study next to mine and the walls were not paper thin but — I don't like what I'm going

to sound like. I'm saying. I wasn't interested. I couldn't have cared less. But I knew there was something going on. I wasn't tattling or I wasn't gossiping because I don't like that kind of thing. I was fully aware of the fact, but that's the only conflict that was fairly obvious.

MEH: Do you remember in that whole conflict, how Ms. Rice's reacted?

PBF: Mrs. Rice? No, I don't.

MEH: What effect do you think all this had on the community?

PBF: I can only speak for myself. I found it disappointing since I was a bit of a prude anyway, and I probably still am. No, I think I'm better now. But I was a little bit shocked. My upbringing, I think, was not really strict but didn't indulge in any of these foolishnesses. But I can't speak for anybody else. I was never aware of any discussion of it.

MEH: It wasn't discussed in the community meetings you were at.

PBF: Not to my knowledge. I — no, I don't think so. In fact, I'm not sure it would ever be discussed in a community meeting. Because I don't think that was the province of the community. It was Rice's personal [UNINTELLIGIBLE] . If he was to be excused from being the Rector, I think it would have had to have been on the basis of something else. In other words, I don't think you can bring personal weaknesses or whatnot into — even though they do perhaps have a bearing on the community. I don't know. But as I say, or as I think I said before, I was always a little bit afraid of Mr. Rice. He had pretty sharp tongue sometimes, and he could cut right through most anything. I found him sort of flustering. But he was a good man to start it.

MEH: What about Ted Dreier? Do you have any particular memories of Ted?

PBF: Oh, yeah. I always liked him very much, and I loved Bobbie. I used to baby sit for them occasionally — go up to their house. We were all on the roof sunning ourselves. I would very often sit with Bobbie. She was very nice. But I found Ted Dreier interesting because I loved physics. And, I think I told you, I took a Physics of Sound course with him.

MEH: Yes, that's a pretty serious thing.

PBF: In a manner of speaking, yes, very serious.

MEH: I mean, pretty tough thing.

PBF: Oh, yes. I don't pretend to have been equipped necessarily, but I was so interested in music and production of sound and making these pipes and all these things all sort of led one to another. And that was great fun. But I always like Ted. I always admired him.

MEH: What do you think [VIDEO ONLY SECTION BEGINS] his position at the college was in relationship to Rice and Albers?

PBF: I have no idea. I think he was — [IRRELEVANT COMMENTS] [VIDEOTAPE ONLY SECTION ENDS.]

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

[TAPE 2, SIDE 3 BEGINS]

MEH: [AUDIOTAPE SECTION ONLY BEGINS] We had been talking about Mr. Rice. Oh, and then I had asked you if — you were talking about the Dreiers. You were talking about Bobbie Dreier.

PBF: Yes, I don't think I had anything more to offer you. [AUDIOTAPE SECTION ONLY ENDS]

MEH: Oh, you were talking about the music class — the Physics of Sound, you talked about.

PBF: I think, I finished that.

MEH: You finished that. Ok.

PBF: No, I liked the Dreiers, visited them several times up in the Adirondacks.

MEH: One thing that I'm not really clear on. Ok, let me just ask you two other questions since I'm trying to straighten out all of these families. Who did Caroline marry? Was it a Black Mountain person?

PBF: No.

MEH: Ok.

PBF: She married — I can't think of her first husband's name. No, she married Roland Bailey and he died.

MEH: He was not at Black Mountain?

PBF: No.

MEH: And, she's not living is she?

PBF: No.

MEH: What did she do?

PBF: She was very creative and taught things dramatic. She could put on plays, and she was very good at that. She did it at the camp — the Frenches' camp, Alamoosook. And did it working with women's prison groups. Very clever. And then she also ran the studio at camp which was drawing, modeling, whatever.

She was quite a creative person. I never saw any products that she herself could make, but she was able to bring it out in other people.

MEH: Does the camp still exist?

PBF: No, it just sort of ran out of steam. When Nat became headmaster, he couldn't run the school and the camp because his mother had given it up because John French needed more care. So, we took it over, and he tried it for a year, and it just was too much. So then I did it. I ran it for a couple of years. It was not my cup of tea, and so a friend who was also a teacher at the school took it on. He and his wife did it for several years, quite successfully. Then there was still another man after that but finally he gave it up. They were all teachers that were taking it on.

MEH: Teachers at North Shore — ?

PBF: At North Shore or wherever. And, I think, 1955 was the last year, about the same time as Black Mountain closed. That was '57.

MEH: '57.

PBF: Yes, I think so. And so — but it didn't leave the family, and then when it was sold, it was bought by one of the people who had come there as a junior camper and had adored the place. He had inherited some wealth and bought it and he still owns it, the campground, but it's resting now. It needed the rest, too. All those little feet really —

MEH: Pounded it down —

PBF: Pounded it down so all the roots stuck up and everything. It needed it.

MEH: It's restoring itself.

PBF: But, it's a very nice spot. It's about two acres.

MEH: Ok, I'm trying to straighten all these families out. Ok, so this is Caroline —
Where did she live?

PBF: Cohasset.

MEH: That's in Maine?

PBF: No, Massachusetts.

MEH: In Massachusetts. Ok, and then, John.

PBF: Jack.

MEH: French. Was John his name and they called him Jack?

PBF: Yes. He was John Robert Putnam, Jr.

MEH: Ok. And what did he do?

PBF: He was a professor at Ann Arbor.

MEH: Right. Teaching psychology. And he died.

PBF: And he died.

MEH: Recently.

PBF: Yes, a year, a year-and-a-half, two years ago.

MEH: And he was married to Sophie Hunt. Who was at Black Mountain. Or was she
not?

PBF: No.

MEH: She wasn't at Black —

PBF: No. Well, they were at Black Mountain after she was married.

MEH: Right. Ok.

PBF: Yes.

MEH: Now, were the Frenches related to the Baileys at all.

PBF: No, not to my knowledge.

MEH: Ok.

PBF: And that's what makes me think it must be the Cambridge School.

MEH: Did the Baileys run the Cambridge School? No, the Frenches ran the Cambridge School.

PBF: Yes. No, the Bailey's. There was Ruthie Bailey. She lived — I think she lived — I get Ruthie Bailey and Molly Gregory mixed up. No, I'm sure it was the Cambridge School. No, relationship and nothing to do with the running of the school.

MEH: Ok.

PBF: She may have taught.

MEH: At Black Mountain? Or, at the Cambridge School maybe.

PBF: Yes, maybe, I'm not sure.

MEH: Right. Ok. At least I have the Frenches straightened out.

PBF: Yes.

MEH: And so, you left Black Mountain and got married.

PBF: Right away. Yes.

MEH: Did you ever get a degree?

PBF: No, I didn't try. I don't know what I would have gotten a degree in. And I really wasn't interested. I don't think I pursued one field from all the points that you have to pursue in order to concentrate, so to speak. And I don't think I could do that. But I did do a lot of growing up.

MEH: Do you think you would have grown up the same way in another environment?

PBF: Who knows?

MEH: Right. How would you compare Bennington with Black Mountain? I think, the flute situation is very — is illustrative in some ways, but maybe it's just an isolated incident.

PBF: I think that was just an isolated incident.

MEH: How would you compare the two schools?

PBF: Well, Bennington, for one thing, was all women. It was pretty spiffy at that time. I was there the third year of Bennington as I was the third year of Black Mountain. Bennington had all the brand new buildings and was pretty well-coiffed and taken care of. A lot of the perks which Black Mountain didn't have any of. And Bennington was a much bigger institution. I don't think they are the same at all educational-wise. I wouldn't know how to evaluate. I really don't know how to answer that question. I don't even know what I think about it. I liked it at Bennington. I was glad to have gone there, also glad to get the opportunity to go to Black Mountain. It seemed to be more of a — it required you to put out a little bit more of yourself in dealing with relationships and that sort of thing.

MEH: Do you think you can find your snapshots?

PBF: Yes, I don't think they are really very exciting.

MEH: Well, let's take a look.

PBF: There's one of Jack and Rubye, I think. I can't think of anything else.

[IRRELEVANT COMMENTS]

[END OF SIDE 3. END OF TRANSCRIPTION]