

Interviewee: RENATE BENFEY WILKINS
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION] Renate, how did you come to be at Black Mountain College?

RBW: Well, it goes way back. I did not choose the college. I came to Black Mountain with my aunt and uncle, Josef and Anni Albers, who were teaching at Black Mountain at the time. I needed to finish high school so they took me down there in order to free up my parents so that they could find their place, after we got here – in this country. So this was in January of '40, I guess, that I went to Black Mountain and went to Black Mountain High School. Lived with them, at the college, when we were still over at Blue Ridge, and finished high school that spring. They were glad to see me go. They didn't quite know what to do with my transcript.

MEH: You mean the high school was glad to see you go, or – ?

RBW: Yes. Because they just didn't quite know what to do with me, since it had German courses and English courses in it. They were happy to see me graduate. I was young. They only had eleven years at the Black Mountain High School in those years, and so I was only sixteen when I graduated. Then that fall I entered Black Mountain College as a regular student, and I was there for

three years doing entirely liberal arts – not at all the arts, like later students would have, but at that time Black Mountain was a liberal arts college.

MEH: Did you come directly from Europe to Black Mountain College?

RBW: No, I went to New York. We arrived – we landed in New York.

MEH: When did you come?

RBW: In December '39, Christmas '39.

MEH: That was very late to have come.

RBW: Yes.

MEH: Did you come directly?

RBW: We had been in England for eleven months and came over on a refugee ship that, to our surprise, was going after the War had started over there. We landed in New York, and then the Albers drove up to New York in January and picked me up and we drove back to Black Mountain together.

MEH: Did your whole family come over together, you and your siblings?

RBW: My youngest brother and my parents and I. I have a middle brother who had been in England for two years before, living with friends, and he stayed there and actually finished all his schooling, including a Ph.D., before he came to this country.

MEH: So your high school was of German and English and American.

RBW: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: The grand finale – Black Mountain High School! [LAUGHS]

RBW: Yes, right. [LAUGHS]

MEH: Did you have any expectations about the college before you came down?

RBW: I really didn't know anything about it. I was a very naive sixteen-year-old, who was still learning the language. I knew the language, basically, but I didn't know a lot of the nuances and things. No, it was time to go to college and so there I was. [LAUGHS]

MEH: Going back to your family a little bit, your father and Anni Albers were brother and sister?

RBW: No. My mother and Anni were sisters.

MEH: They were sisters. Okay, I had that confused. So was your father Jewish?

RBW: We were all Jewish.

MEH: You were all Jewish.

RBW: We were all Jewish by background, but Anni's and mother's parents – my grandparents – had already converted, and my father converted when he was in law school. So, we were brought up as Protestants, but as far as Hitler was concerned, we were all Jewish.

MEH: Yes, that's what – I didn't know whether – I knew that, I think Anni Albers –

RBW: Was Jewish. Josef was not.

MEH: Okay. But – okay, I'm still confused. Okay, your mother and Anni Albers were sisters. Then their – I'm trying to think – her mother had converted but her father, your father, was your father, did he convert? [I'm confusing generations – thinking of Benfey's grandfather rather than her father.]

RBW: My father? Yes, he did. But as a student.

MEH: Okay, as a student, later. But still Hitler –

RBW: That didn't make any difference. Racially, quote-unquote, we were all “Jews.”

MEH: But you stayed in Germany for a long time. Did you feel – Well, I guess you didn't know, but your parents must have felt safe for quite a while.

RBW: Well, my father had been a judge and had a pension. He was in the First World War, and so they didn't think he was in any danger until after the Kristallnacht in '38. At that point my mother said, "You're not staying here." He was going to stay while the rest of us left for a while, and mostly, as I understand it now, the information that we had to get out came from the U.S., from Anni – from the Albers and also from other friends of theirs. They read about it more than we did in Germany, and so that's when Mother made the arrangements for us all to get out. So, actually my youngest brother and I went to England in January of '39, and then my parents didn't come to England until May of '39, and then we left together.

MEH: You were very lucky.

RBW: Yes.

MEH: So you arrived in this country. When you came to this country, did you have any real conception or preconception in terms of what it would be like?

RBW: Not really. No, I was very naive and very Pollyannaish. What I wanted was to get on with it. I looked at things pretty much positively, as I think I've done all my life.

MEH: So, the first year you were at Black Mountain – I had it that you were at the college from 1940 to '43.

RBW: That's right.

MEH: Okay, but I had you there – that would be three years.

RBW: Right. At college.

MEH: At Black Mountain.

RBW: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: So did you enroll – was it the year before you were in high school that you came? When you came, the college was still at Blue Ridge.

RBW: Yes. We moved. I think we must have moved over to Lake Eden in '41. That year before, we were all working on the new building.

MEH: What do you remember about that?

RBW: Oh, it was wonderful. We rode the truck across the valley, and I think I was mostly lifting cement things into the cement mixer so that other people could pour the cement for the foundations, I guess. Then I also remember we tried to nail oak flooring down – later on. I've never seen such bendable nails as when we were trying to do that. [LAUGHS] But there was wonderful spirit. Everybody worked together, and it really was, it was a great group of people.

MEH: It was a very different life style than you had been accustomed to in Germany.

RBW: Oh, yes.

MEH: Did you adapt pretty easily?

RBW: Yes. I've never had any trouble adapting to new things, I guess. If they had to be, they had to be.

MEH: Did you have any particular interest in subject fields? You had said you were really in a liberal arts school at that point.

RBW: Yes. I was doing languages, mostly, at that point. That seemed to be logical, and so actually I took Russian, Spanish, and French at Black Mountain.

Russian only for one year, but a very intensive year. But Spanish and French I think for all three years I was there.

MEH: Who was teaching languages?

RBW: There was a Fran de Graaff, who taught – I wonder whether she taught French or Russian, I don't remember right now.

MEH: Russian.

RBW: Russian, okay. I don't remember the names of the people that taught French and Spanish. But I, you know, I took a lot of the other things too – and I can't tell you exactly what, but they were interesting courses. I'm sure I took some English from Bob Wunsch and some of those people. I took one art course with Josef Albers. Scared me half to death. Not only was he my uncle, but I was no good in art whatsoever. [LAUGHS] He was a hard taskmaster.

MEH: You must have been a small child when they left for this country, 1933?

RBW: Yes, I was nine I guess in '33. I knew them, but I certainly didn't know them well.

MEH: When you came to Blue Ridge, they were living in Lee Hall.

RBW: Yes. I had a room right next to theirs. I don't know – they may have had two rooms there, or whatever, but I had one room right next to them. They were wonderful. They pretty much left me alone except when I needed them. I mean they knew – They didn't have children, they didn't want children, so – they treated me like an adult, and they were very nice. After we moved over to Lake Eden, I needed an appendectomy suddenly, and Anni drove me to Asheville to the hospital and was very solicitous.

MEH: It seems like maybe it was an ideal situation where you could still be parented and protected but also have a lot of independence.

RBW: Yes.

MEH: And they could feel like they were parenting, but not –

RBW: Right. I made a lot of friends, and some of them have lasted. My two closest friends have died in the last few years. There was Ruth Burnett, Ruth O'Neill Burnett – she died in a car accident about four years ago, maybe. Then Mimi French Batchelor died just a year and a half ago or so, in Florida. It's surprising. We weren't in touch very often, but when we were, it was nice. Ruth and I came to the reunion together, the one down at Black Mountain – and we had a great time together. It was fun. [INAUDIBLE].

MEH: Are there other particular memories you have of the college? Did you do any work with the drama performances? With Bob Wunsch?

RBW: I did one and realized I wasn't any good at that either, but yes, I was in an Irish play, Something from the Sea?

MEH: I know what you're talking about. I can't think now. I think it was an Ingres (Synge?) play, maybe.

RBW: It's been done a number of times since then. But it was fun, and we all participated in some of the music activities. I took a music course, I guess, from Jalowetz – and he was great.

MEH: What was Jalowetz like? How would you describe him?

RBW: It's hard to tell. He was a very kind kind of a person, teacher. I think – Well, I don't remember anything about the classes, really, but both he and his wife

were very important members of the community. I do remember them both. We sang, we had a choir, I guess, which was part of his course, and we did a lot of work on Bach, especially the Brandenburg Concertos, and that was fun. The Dreiers were very close friends, and I was there when their son got killed in a car accident right there on the campus. I babysat for them quite a bit. But, of course, they were very close friends of the Albers, so that's how I got to know them.

MEH: I'm sure you do remember, when Mark was killed –

RBW: Yes, that's the one I mean.

MEH: Right. Do you have any particular memories of that day?

RBW: Oh, it was a gruesome situation that day. Everybody was just really struck. And, and yes, the amazing memory was that really nobody accused the black cook whose car – He was riding on the running board of the car of the black cook, who was a wonderful man and everybody loved him. So, I don't think there was ever any antipathy or blaming or anything like that. He, I guess, practically killed himself trying to lift the car off of Mark, and it was just one of those real freak-type accidents.

MEH: How did a community like Black Mountain handle that sort of situation?

RBW: Well, I think the meditation house or room or whatever it was called was built in memory of Mark, and that was a very lovely way of remembering him. I guess it was built by the people at Black Mountain.

MEH: It was built by Bill Reed, and you probably remember –

RBW: Oh, I remember Bill Reed very well, yes. [AFFIRMATIVE] He was one of Anni's star pupils, and he did a lot of very good things. Another one, another student of theirs, I guess more of Josef's rather than Anni's, was Don Page, and he was a good friend. I'd forgotten that Bill Reed at least designed it, I suppose, but he must have had help building it.

MEH: Well, he basically did it himself.

RBW: Oh, really.

MEH: Working a lot with Molly Gregory, with the wood –

RBW: Yes, she was a good friend too. Is she still alive?

MEH: Yes.

RBW: [AFFIRMATIVE] She must be in her late eighties by now.

MEH: At least.

RBW: Yes. Is she still living in Wenham? Ted Dreier was just a wonderful person. He was, I think, warmer – I felt he was even warmer than Bobbie. I worked for him in Cambridge one year when he – I don't know what he was doing there specifically, but I was his secretary, part-time, very much part-time while I was going to college up there, after I left Black Mountain.

MEH: When you were living at Lake Eden, did you live in the same house with the Dreiers and –

RBW: No. No, I lived –

MEH: You lived in the dorm?

RBW: I lived in the dorm, where – you know, one of those buildings was men and the other one was the women. The first year we were over there, Ruth O'Neill

Burnett and I were up in the attic with a bunch of other people. Then the second year, we were downstairs. We had a double room to ourselves downstairs. That was very special [LAUGHS], and we got along very well. She was from Wisconsin, I think, and so this was all quite new to her, too. But she at least had chosen the place, and, of course, I never chose the place. I just happened to be there. [LAUGHS]

MEH: What were your parents doing in New York at this time?

RBW: They very soon moved to Boston, and they started out in a refugee house that had been made – a house that had been made available to some refugees, in Medford, Mass. Then mother got a job with a professor from M.I.T. whose wife needed help in the house and companionship in the house. I think they were also – No, they were, I think they were in Cambridge, and mother, I guess, commuted from Medford to Cambridge and worked with them for several years. They became very close friends. Then eventually my mother and father moved to Cambridge, and she became assistant manager at the Window Shop. You've heard of that? The restaurant, refugee restaurant?

MEH: I want you to tell me a little more about it. Lore Kadden, whom I'm going to visit, she also was at the Window Shop and came from the Window Shop to Black Mountain. She and her mother were working at the Window Shop.

RBW: Well, they would know my mother then.

MEH: Right, so tell me what you remember about the Window Shop.

RBW: Well it was wonderful food, very rich. The people working there I think were all refugees. No, they weren't all refugees. Some of them were, some of the

workers in the kitchen and such were not. They came from the Cambridge community, or Somerville or some of that area. But they were very supportive of each other, and Mother and the head – manager of the Window Shop, Mrs. Broch, were very close friends and they stayed close friends all the rest of their lives. After Mother retired to North Carolina and Mrs. Broch retired to Texas, each of them to be with, near one of their sons, they were always very good friends. Mostly the problem with Window Shop was that the food was too rich and too good. I remember when Mother was in the hospital, the Window Shop wanted to do something good for me and my young daughter. We were there to see Mother, and we stayed in her apartment and were there when she came home from the hospital. So they insisted that we have dinner there every night, so we did. But my daughter, of course, was very young and wanted nothing but hamburgers and they were very greasy hamburgers. They had lovely buttered coating all around and on the roll and everything else. We had to kind of teach them that that wasn't the best way to do it. [LAUGHS] But they were wonderful to us, and every time we went to see them when Mother was working there, they were always very generous and very warm and friendly.

MEH: So the Window Shop continued after the war years?

RBW: Yes, but it changed. Oh, of course, it continued for quite a while after the war years. I mean we were – That's when Mother was working there. But then after Mrs. Broch left, and Mother left, too, I think they cut it back to, for a while, just the bakery or just a tea room again, where you could have tea and baked goods – or else it became just a lunch place. I don't remember exactly, but I

know the bakery went on for a long time. The gift shop I didn't think lasted quite as long. But I think that's partly because the older generation of refugees was getting older and retiring, and there wasn't the need any more for them to get employed.

MEH: What had your father done in Germany?

RBW: My father was a judge in one of the Berlin courts, and he was twenty-six years older than my mother. He was sixty-five when we left, so he never even tried to use the law after we moved. So, mother was basically the supporting member of the family, the support of the family. He'd helped out part-time with some typing and things like that at the Window Shop after they moved to Cambridge, but he never did much more work at that point. He died when he was seventy-eight, so he didn't live – He lived till '53.

MEH: Now I understand my confusion. I just straightened out. I was thinking that your father was Anni Albers' brother, and her brother lived a great deal longer in this country.

RBW: Her brother is still alive.

MEH: Is he still alive?

RBW: Yes [AFFIRMATIVE], he lives in Old Greenwich and is –

MEH: How old is he?

RBW: Ninety-two years old.

MEH: Okay. Because I had met him before and I – now I'm straightened out, because I still in my mind was thinking of him as your father when he was not. He was your uncle. Your father was much older than both – all of them.

RBW: Right. Yes.

MEH: Okay. Good. Now it's coming a little clearer. Okay. So going back to Black Mountain, do you have any particular memories of mealtime at the college?

RBW: Yes. I don't remember – Breakfast and lunch must have been very casual and quick, but dinner was sit-down dinner. I think we dressed for it. Several times a week, if not every night, we danced after dinner, and John Evarts played the piano. That was wonderful. I mean it really brought the community together. That was the faculty and students, of course, together always. I don't think the faculty always came down for dinner. Some of them probably had some of their meals in their little cottages. But much of the time they were there because they didn't get paid enough to buy their own groceries very often [LAUGHS]. So this was all part of their way of life and their pay. But the community was very close. I think that way. I think it wasn't until after the war started here that things started to disintegrate and a lot of the tensions arose. Of course, I think Bob Wunsch's having to leave was tragic for the college, because he seemed to be able to really hold the community together in a remarkable way. He was the Rector for quite a long time. Then it varied. I guess Ted Dreier was the head of it for a while, and Josef Albers was the head of it for a while, and there was a lot of disagreement, and then after a lot of the younger men were drafted, it really changed the tone tremendously, because that's when the way out, quote-unquote, artists came in and it became the arty kind of school, and it became, well, it just became the art school instead of really the liberal arts school, and they were much more their own characters. I don't think there –

That was mostly after my time. I really, I think I was there in some of the best years of the college, when the college was still growing I think, and this community spirit was there and really very effective and wonderful.

MEH: But by the time, by 1943 when you left, it was largely at the point a community of refugees and some Americans. Did you feel the refugee presence was that strong, or – ?

RBW: Well, there were a lot of refugees there, but there were a lot of Americans there too. Who was it? Fred Kurtz was there. I think he was an American.

MEH: Ken Kurtz.

RBW: Ken Kurtz. He taught English. There were all different nationalities, of course. The people that were teaching the different languages were not necessarily Hitler refugees, but they might have been foreign. Fran de Graaff, I think, was Dutch. I don't remember for sure. Of course, it was a tiny community so that I don't know how many faculty members actually were there but probably no more than about twenty, twenty-five, altogether. There were only about seventy of us students there. That was about the maximum. Maybe it once went up to a hundred, but I think it came down again very quickly.

MEH: Did you ever leave the college and go into the surrounding area?

RBW: Well, I went into Asheville a few times, with the group. I didn't get around an awful lot. No. There were a few people that had cars. We had some very good friends at a camp nearby that was where conscientious objectors were living and working, but mostly they came over to see us, so that broadened the community a little bit. But I don't – I can't even think of the names [LAUGHS] of

some of them. A couple of them were Mt. Holyoke, I mean Black Mountain students. Names should come back to me shortly, but right now they're gone.

MEH: So even though you ended up at Black Mountain, not of your choice, were you glad to be there, as you look back?

RBW: Yes. It was a wonderful place for me to get my feet on the ground and grow up a bit and figure out what I was doing, what I could do. After I left Black Mountain at the end of the three years – I did pass the exam that they had before you could go into the Upper Division to graduate. That was a sort of milestone. Then I went to Cambridge. My parents were in Cambridge by that time, and I had a room there and I took a secretarial course for just a few months and then got a job with the American Friends Service Committee. Then after a year-and-a-half of working, I went to Boston University and in another two and a half years I finished college, finally [LAUGHS] and then I majored in Sociology.

MEH: Do you remember if Boston University accepted your Black Mountain credits?

RBW: Oh, yes. Most of my courses were transferred. [AFFIRMATIVE] I mean I switched majors and so it took a little more than just another year, obviously. But it worked out pretty well. It was during that time while I was at Boston University that I worked for Ted Dreier for a number of months.

MEH: How would you compare your education at Boston University and your education at Black Mountain?

RBW: I think so far as the classwork was concerned, it was very similar. I had good professors and good courses. Obviously the university versus the small college

was very different, but I didn't live at Boston University and so I didn't get any of the feeling of a big campus. I just went to class and came home. I did get to know at least one of the professors at BU quite well – Peter Bertocci – I don't know if you know of him. He was a philosophy professor. So even there I had – there was that little bit of a personal touch, but that was because he was that kind of a person.

MEH: What did you do at Black Mountain on the Work Program?

RBW: Mostly working on the building, the different kinds of – I guess that's all I did. The building, of course, kept on going even after we moved there. But each of us not only lived in the dorms but then each of us had a small study in the new building. I'm not sure how much Work Program we did after we moved over there.

MEH: Did you work on the farm at all?

RBW: No. Oh, well, I don't know whether this was part of the Work Program or not. I worked in the store that we had there, so I can't imagine that I got paid there. I know I didn't get paid. So that must have been one of the jobs of the Work Program. I do remember that cigarettes cost twenty-five cents a carton or something ridiculous like that [LAUGHS]. But all of it was very good experience for me, and I'm not sure I could have grown up as well at my own pace in other places. Because what I needed was just time to get acclimated to the U.S. and to an educational system. After three years I think I was able to cope, and I don't think I could have coped very well earlier. so I think it was good for me.

MEH: [UNINTEL] It seemed with a father who at that point was much older –

RBW: Oh yes.

MEH: And your mother trying to become – supporting the family and whatever, that it was – it provided you with a community of young people you would not have had in an insular family, an emigré family.

RBW: That's right. I remember my mother telling me that their refugee friends in the Boston area kept telling them that they were crazy to send us to college because what we should be doing is have jobs and make some money and help support them. They wouldn't hear of it. They said and they knew that education was the most important thing they could do for us. So, my younger brother went to Yale, and I to Black Mountain and Boston University, and we both got our degrees. So I think they were absolutely right, but it took some determination on their part to realize that they were that wise, to let us do what needed to be done.

MEH: I'm sure they had a more sophisticated background than many people.

RBW: Oh, yes.

MEH: They realized.

RBW: No, I mean we went through a period when we didn't have any money to speak of, but we never thought of ourselves as poor. I mean there's a difference. It wasn't poverty. It was just that we just happened not to have any money
[LAUGHS].

MEH: Coming as late as you came, you probably just left with the shirt on your back, essentially.

RBW: Yes. Exactly. We each had a trunk and a suitcase, I think, and ten marks or something ridiculous like that. Yes. My mother worked in England for some friends that – well, the friends that we knew that my brother was living with. So she was able to make a little money there, too.

MEH: What was Josef Albers like as an uncle? I know what he was like as a teacher. What was he like as an uncle?

RBW: He was very nice. Not terribly close. Neither of them were very close. I became closer to Anni, in later years, after she, after they lived in Connecticut. Every time Mother came up to visit me, we would drive down to Connecticut and spend time with them. He was very fond of my mother and so they got along very well. Anni was always very protective of him, so that he needed to be left alone to do his own work and family didn't count for very much. So, we never got terribly close, but they were always very nice and cordial. I kept going down to visit her after my mother died, and I think she appreciated that. I think she always remembered that they had been my surrogate parents, and so I think I feel quite warmly toward her. He was always very charming and friendly but not terribly close.

MEH: I think the Black Mountain years when you were there, those very early years, they were struggling so hard as artists to establish their identity.

RBW: Yes.

MEH: I think Anni – she mellowed in her later years a bit.

RBW: She may have. Yes. But she also – I mean they also didn't have any money, so they were struggling from that point of view, and of course Black Mountain fed

them and housed them but didn't pay them very much, so there wasn't any – I don't think they made real money until they went to Yale.

MEH: Right. In fact I heard a story that after they left Black Mountain and he was at Cincinnati briefly, and then they were living in a hotel in New York – People don't realize that he didn't go immediately to Yale, but there was a year there when they had no idea what they were going to do, and they were really retirement age. I've been told that when the person who interviewed them from Yale went to the hotel that the person at the desk said, "They can't pay their rent. Could somebody help them out and pay the rent?" Because they had – Black Mountain did not allow you to save money.

RBW: No, there wasn't any way.

MEH: I don't know if that's true or not. It was really not until their later years that they had any money.

RBW: Right. Yes. They struggled, I'm sure. He wasn't that well known so that I don't think his paintings were selling particularly. It had to be from his teaching. They also spent I think a year in Cambridge, and he was teaching – I don't know whether it was at Harvard or where. It must have been at Harvard. One year. It may have been before he went to Yale.

MEH: Do you have any other particular memories of the college? Anecdotes? What did you do for recreation? For entertainment?

RBW: That's a good question. I think we listened to music a fair amount. We spent a lot of time in our studies. This is terrible but I really don't remember much because that was such a growing up period for me that a lot of it is a blur, which

is too bad. But I know that when I was with Ruth O'Neill Burnett, she remembered things that we had done, and we would talk about them, but they were things that I hardly remember at all. We must have gone to some plays and some concerts and things, and certainly there were things going on at the college – lectures and concerts and so forth, that we all went to.

MEH: Do you have particular memories of Molly Gregory?

RBW: Yes.

MEH: Like – ?

RBW: I like her. I've always liked her very much. Well, she was a terribly down-to-earth – She was a woodworker and I guess she taught shop and must have made a lot of the stuff there. We lost touch very quickly after I left, which was too bad, and then somehow never reestablished any contact at all. But I always liked her and always think of her with very good feelings. I haven't seen her since the college. She was thinking of – Well, I also went, I don't know if you did, I went to a party that John Stix had in New York, just outside of New York. He has built a house next to the Beate Gropius – the two of them combined to –

MEH: Next to Lisa Jalowetz.

RBW: Oh, was it Lisa Jalowetz? Oh I'm sorry, okay. Beate was at the party though, I think. Anyway, it was Lisa Jalowetz and he that engineered this big – almost the reunion type thing. I think Molly planned, hoped to go to that, and we were trying to figure out a way that I could drive down there. But I was staying in Old Greenwich with the Farmans, Hans, my uncle Hans and Betty, and then drove

over to the party from there, and – Ruth went to that, too. That was, that was really fun. That was just an afternoon and evening kind of thing, or mostly an afternoon, long afternoon. But I think that was the last time that Molly and I really communicated at all. I'm glad to know she's still alive.

MEH: She is.

RBW: Any other thoughts that you have about the college? Let's go back – You left. You went to Boston University. What did you do for a profession?

RBW: Well I worked for a year-and-a-half and then went to Boston University, and then did some social work at a settlement house in Cambridge for two years, I think. I got married in '46, before I graduated from college, then had one more semester. Then from '46 to '48 I worked at the settlement house. Then we left, because my husband had gotten his master's at Harvard and we went to Grinnell, Iowa. After that I didn't work again, except part-time at secretarial things. We went to Grinnell, Iowa and he taught there and then we went to Washington University in St. Louis to get his Ph.D. Did that, and then we moved to Alfred, New York, and we were in Alfred for six years before we moved to South Hadley. I had two small children by that time and didn't really plan a career or plan to work particularly, but I did. At Mount Holyoke I started working part-time in the Admissions Office. Then we got divorced and so I knew that I had to have a job, more than just a very part-time job. So after a year, I guess, I became the assistant to the Dean of the Chapel at Mount Holyoke, and did that for three years. That was mostly in student activities, and then I went over into the Dean of Students Office, and by that time I had gotten my

master's degree at Springfield College in student personnel work. Then in the Dean of Students Office I was first Assistant Dean, then Associate Dean, and finally, after eighteen years, the last two years I was the Dean – on an interim basis. The main thing I did until the last two years was student housing and working with the student leaders in the dorms and with the staff in the dorms, the Head Residents and so forth. I loved that job and that was very good. It's sort of my life. I was in the right place at the right time to get that job, and South Hadley was a wonderful place to have my children grow up. After the divorce, my husband left and I was able to stay, so we were in that same house for – I was in that same house for forty-two years when I moved up here. So essentially it was student personnel work that I was doing, as a career.

MEH: What was your husband's field?

RBW: He was in physics. He taught physics, and he had been away – After he graduated from Harvard, that was during the war and he was 4-F, and so he went to Turkey, to Istanbul, to teach at the American school there. Robert College is the name of it. He taught there for two years, and then he came back and we got married. He was from Kentucky, and we were both sort of foreign students in Cambridge and got to know each other that way [LAUGHS]. We were both members of the International Students Center and joined in their activities there in Cambridge. That was before he left for Turkey, and then when he came back, he got his master's at Harvard and after two years we moved on to Grinnell.

MEH: Okay, going back to Black Mountain because I tell people – [INTERRUPTION
IN TAPING] Before we stop talking are there any other particular memories that
you have? Any particular individuals that stand out in your memory?

RWB: I think we've pretty well touched on the ones. John Stix is another one that's
very clear in my memory, and I was delighted when he had this gathering. You
did remember Lisa Jalowetz. I also remember – is it Beate Gropius? I think.

MEH: Ati. They call her Ati.

RBW: Ati, yes, that's right, Ati Gropius. I did get to see the Gropiuses once or twice
when they were living in Lincoln and I was in Cambridge at the time. Of course
that connection was through the Albers, too. But that's nice, and I guess Ati in
some way and I were sort of friends. Not close friends ever, but we got along
very nicely when we were – I'm not sure if she was there when I was there. It
may have been later – at Black Mountain, that is. Or maybe she was – I don't
remember her clearly.

MEH: So as sisters, your mother and Anni – I saw Anni, but whatever – took very
different paths in their lives.

RBW: Oh, yes. They're very different people. Completely different people. My mother
was not an artist. She appreciated art and music but she could do neither. She
was very practical. She got along with everybody, but she also had very firm
opinions on what was right and what was wrong, [LAUGHS] and everybody
didn't necessarily do what she thought was right or wrong. No, she was a real
matriarch in our family, and her children and grandchildren, especially her
grandchildren, just truly admired her – and what they remember of her. Many of

them, of course, don't remember her now. But she was a very impressive woman that everybody remembers, I think, whoever was in touch with her. I mean all three – Anni, Mother, and Hans – were very different people, very amazingly different. Of course, Hans is ten years younger than Anni, so he was the little boy who was embarrassed by his sisters and his mother for a long time in Berlin [LAUGHS].

MEH: Why? Because – ?

RBW: Well, just because he was a young teenager and that was the way young teenagers react to their female siblings and parents.

MEH: Do you have any – Did you have any contact with the Bauhaus? Do you have any memory of that?

RBW: No. None at all. Everything I know about the Bauhaus I've read since I've been an adult.

MEH: Well, probably you've answered this but how did you travel to Black Mountain when you first went there? Do you recall?

RBW: When we first went down? We drove by car.

MEH: So you went with the Albers.

RBW: With the Albers [AFFIRMATIVE]. Yes. He was driving most of the time. He taught me about driving. He taught me quite a bit about how to drive at night and not to look into the lights but look to the right side of the road, various things like that. Yes. Oh, he also taught – It was very interesting. He said the places to stop on the road when you need to get a meal was where there were a lot of trucks stopped, because then there would be plenty of food and it would

be good solid food. So that's what we did on our way down. He was in some ways a very practical man, I guess. Because he'd had a very interesting career and background himself from rather poor beginnings. He started out as a schoolteacher, I think, before he went to the Bauhaus and became an artist.

MEH: See, memories are floating as we talk.

RBW: Yes. Well, you begin to remember the little odds and ends of things.

MEH: Even in his teaching, he taught practicality. He taught economy in terms of use of means in art.

RBW: Yes. I mean the things that I remember in the art course that I took with him were making up collages, where you had to collect stuff, you know, leaves and stuff like that and try to put them on paper in some way. I always think, "How simple, if I could just do this the way other people do it. " But I could never quite think of them myself. [LAUGHS] I'm not a creative type person.

MEH: What do you remember about Black Mountain High School?

RBW: It was strange. I had a boyfriend, for some reason. I don't know what he saw in me at the time. I don't remember his name or anything about him, but I guess, mostly I went to school. The thing I remember most about that was that the French teacher I had had had less French than I had had. I did not have enough sense to keep my mouth shut, so I don't think she liked me very much in her class. I kept saying, "Why aren't we reading?" We were always translating. "Why aren't we reading and pronouncing this language?" She must have hated having me there. But other than that, I really don't remember much. I must have learned some American history because I hadn't had any of that

before, and I must have taken some English, and I know I took geometry and French, and that was enough to try to give me what they needed to round out my transcript enough so they could graduate me and get rid of me quick.

[LAUGHS]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]