

Interviewee: HARRISON BEGAY
Participant: SOPHIA GORMAN
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. Mr. Begay, do you remember going to Black Mountain College?

HB: Yes, I do remember.

MEH: How did you get there?

HB: Well, I met a Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and her daughter went to school over there, before. So, she—so he suggested that I go there.

MEH: Do you remember the name of the person who suggested it?

HB: I don't remember the name. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs. I don't remember at that time.

MEH: Why do you think he wanted you to go there?

HB: I really don't—I was thinking of going to school someplace, so I didn't have any place to go. I didn't have any place picked out yet at that time. So, he suggested I go there. Sort of gave me a scholarship to go there. They suggested I get—they'd give me a scholarship to go there to school. So that was all right.

MEH: Where were you living at the time?

HB: I was living in Santa Fe, New Mexico at that time.

MEH: Is that where you grew up?

HB: No. I grew up in Arizona, but I'd been to Santa Fe Indian School there. I went to school there. I finished high school over there.

MEH: When you went to Black Mountain, had you just finished high school?

HB: Yes, after I—After I'd been to high school, all of my class went to other schools like University of New Mexico and other places, so I chose to go to Black Mountain because of the scholarship.

MEH: Did you know then that you wanted to be an artist?

HB: I went to learn more about art over there in Black Mountain College. There was a good professor over there, from Europe, that was teaching over there in Black Mountain College.

MEH: Josef Albers?

HB: [AFFIRMATIVE?]

MEH: Do you remember how—[INTERRUPTION]

HB: Yes, when I got there, I found the—the art teacher was away. He went to South America for the year. So, there wasn't any art teacher, so I chose whatever they had. I chose to learn architect. But I also learned European history and—let's see, what was it?—and mathematic. This architect and European history and mathematic. The three main subjects I learned over there. Of course, I did learn some of others, like a little French and Spanish, a little bit of that, too.

MEH: So that year they were building a new building?

HB: Well, yeah, when I went over there, they had a—Black Mountain College was using a place where people spent the summer times for vacation. They called it

Blue Ridge, North Carolina. That building was there already. But this Black Mountain school or college hasn't been built at that time.

MEH: That year they were building the new building over at Lake Eden?

HB: Yeah, they were building—Blue Ridge is still a ways from Black Mountain, and they were building during that time. They started building Black Mountain College in Black Mountain, North Carolina.

MEH: Did you help with the building?

HB: I helped—we helped to build that place.

MEH: Do you have any particular memories of building that year? What did you do?

HB: I don't remember what I did there. We didn't do much, though. Oh, just a little bit of stuff. Just preliminary, just like, just—the landscape that's all. We hadn't built the house yet though. Doing those things around the campus. That's the—I don't remember just what, anyway. We did a little work there. Not really building the house, though. Probably build some lumber or something like that, you know. Brought some lumber and things like that.

MEH: Do you remember any of your classes? Any of the teachers?

HB: Well, I remember the reason Black Mountain was formed was because a lot of professors from Europe came over, especially those who were not—those who were opposed to Mr. Hitler. That time of the year. A lot of Jewish people and other people who were not wanted in Germany. So, there were a lot of people in Germany came over, and also from other countries, like I think Spain, too. So, that's why they started a little school over there, all those professors,

people who were learned like—Also a lot of the students were also from a lot of other countries, even from Germany and from Spain, and one from Russia. Even one from Japan, too. There were not very many students, probably maybe—not too many. Under fifty. Not over fifty. That was for one year.

MEH: Do you remember any of the classes? Do you remember the architecture classes? Somebody named Larry Kocher was teaching.

HB: I remember. I don't remember what the name of the man was that taught architecture. He was from California. I learned a lot of drafting, especially architectural drafting, mostly.

MEH: What about the other students? What were they like?

HB: Well, a lot of people—there were some boys and girls. Well, all of different age—not, most of them were not young.

MEH: Was this your first time in a different culture than an Indian culture?

HB: Yes. [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: How did you like it?

HB: I don't mind. I like it. I like it.

MEH: Do you remember anything like music concerts? Or did you dance?

HB: No, I don't remember it. What I like is we liked to, after, during the weekend we liked to go up different places, like climbing—all the beautiful places around there. Beautiful mountains, things like that, you know. I used to go around, all around the Blue Ridge North Carolina country. That was a beautiful country. I've been around, and I enjoyed seeing all these places around there. Asheville,

North Carolina and some other places. We had a lot of—a lot of people over there. Cherokee Indians were over there, too. I've met a lot of these. They were around Asheville, North Carolina.

MEH: Yes, the Cherokee Indians. Did you go over to meet them?

HB: No, I didn't go, but most of the Cherokee, they were most out there around Asheville, around there. So, when I was walking, I met a lot of them around there.

MEH: Did you study any art?

HB: Yes, I studied architect. That's art [UNINTEL]. Not real art, but I do paint—what I did myself during that time, in my spare time over there. I made a lot of paintings over there too.

MEH: And these were paintings of Indians?

HB: Yes. Yes, the way I do my Indian painting. Of course, I did—I painted—A lot of people wanted my Indian paintings, though. I've painted for them, so that helped me out over the expense, you know, over the—I went there for one year, that's all.

MEH: Why did you stay only one year?

HB: Well, I didn't want to go back again, but the reason thought I might stay over here. I wanted to finish college, instead of going back. I didn't stay too long and finish college. It's account about the war. I had to go. I'd been enlisted in the army.

MEH: I see. Okay. Do you have any other memories of the college? About the mealtimes? Eating at the college, how it was done?

HB: Yes. [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: What do you remember?

HB: Well, we used to—Early in the morning, get up. Eat whenever we want to at noon time. Any time. We could go over any time.

MEH: Do you have any other memories of things that you did at the college? What did you think about the college?

HB: I think it was wonderful because I met a lot of people over there. Mostly people from foreign countries, especially. Most of the people there, teachers, they were from foreign countries. Also, a lot of students there from foreign countries, too. That's where I learned how to speak a little French and maybe a little German. A little German. Spanish.

MEH: Did you take a class? Or did you just learn it from speaking to people.

HB: Yes, I took a class [UNINTEL]. I took a class in architect and mathematics and others.

MEH: Do you have any other memories of the college? Things that you remember that you did?

HB: Well, I don't remember the other things. There's a lot of things that I guess I should know, but I've got—it's been a long time.

MEH: It has been a long time. Very long time. Over sixty years.

HB: Yes. [AFFIRMATIVE]. For entertainment we'd go to—sometimes we'd go to the town, dance over there, or sometimes to the show, things like that. Oh, maybe sometimes we'd go to a show of some kind like a horse show or some other kind of shows, different kind of show. I've forgot what they were.

MEH: Do you remember any of the students in particular?

HB: Gosh, I don't even remember all—I don't even remember the names of the students. I've forgot all their names. All their different names. I know there's one boy that was from Albuquerque. He was the only one that was from—he was the only one. He was my roommate. I've forgot his name.

MEH: Do you remember someone, a music teacher—Do you remember a music teacher, John Evarts, who played the piano for dances?

HB: Yes, there was a music teacher and so forth, but I just don't remember their names.

MEH: What about—You grew up in a—really in a desert. What did you think of the mountains where there were so many trees So many plants?

HB: Well, I I didn't—It didn't make no difference to me, desert or mountain, you know. All the same to me anyway. I didn't even think about a difference when I was there.

MEH: That's interesting.

HB: Well, I've been in the desert there during the summertime, but in the wintertime I'll be at school, in the cold country, at Fort Wingate, so it didn't make very much

difference about—between the desert and the mountains to me. To me they're all the same.

MEH: Do you remember how you traveled there? Did you take a bus, or the train? Do you remember?

HB: Traveling? Yeah, I took the bus from here to—all the way to North Carolina. Went through Texas and from there on all the way to North Carolina. During Christmas vacation, I came back to Santa Fe. Of course, I came with some people from Denver. There were some people coming. Some students from Denver. I came back with them in their car.

MEH: Do you remember if one of those was named Don Page? Do you know the name Don Page? Was one of them Don Page, maybe?

HB: No. I don't remember.

MEH: But you came back just for Christmas vacation?

HB: Yeah. [AFFIRMATIVE] Came back for Christmas vacation. When I go, I go back on the bus, but coming back I usually came back with some other boys, other boys in their car. After springtime, when the school was over in June, I came back. I went to—went up to New York. I was in Washington, D.C. Went to New York. I went to Chicago, and before I came back. I went to see a lot of those big cities.

MEH: And so, you went to all of these cities on the way back to Santa Fe?

HB: Yes. [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: And what did you do when you got back?

HB: Well, I just came back to Santa Fe.

MEH: Did you go to school?

HB: No, I just got—I just stayed there, and I'd do some art work. That's all I'd do. Just paint pictures. That's all. I'm thinking of living on painting pictures. That's all. Of course, I got a home over here in Arizona where my father and my sister were living, but I haven't been home for, for a long time, to Arizona. I've been away. The reason is because my mother died when I was just a little kid. My father got married again. So, he was married to another lady, so I didn't—That's the reason I didn't stay with them. I [UNINTEL] for a long time. I've been away from—I'm away where I can be by myself. Sometimes one of my relatives—

MEH: So, you live mostly in Santa Fe.

HB: Yes. [AFFIRMATIVE].

MEH: And you went to the mission school there. Is that where you learned to paint, the mission school?

HB: Yes, I learned how to paint over there in the Santa Fe Indian School when I went through, before I went down, before I [UNINTEL] high school, I learned about—I stayed about four years when I left home. About four years I stayed in Santa Fe and learned how to paint.

MEH: Who did you study with? Do you remember who your teacher—

HB: Her name was Dorothy Dunn. She was my teacher all the way.

MEH: During the war—were you in service during the war? In the army?

HB: Yes, I went to—Yeah, I went into the army after—I was at Pearl Harbor. That's where—I went to—I went out of the way. I didn't go up to the Pacific. I've went to Iceland. I been in Iceland for quite a while. Then I went to Europe. Then I went to Europe. The first day I was in—My first day in Normandy—June 6th. Was that right? I was in Signal Corps.

MEH: So, you were at the Normandy Invasion?

HB: Yeah, I was in Normandy Invasion.

MEH: You lived to tell the tale. You survived. [INTERRUPTION]

MEH: Do you have any other memories of Black Mountain? If you think about it? It's a long time ago.

HB: Yes, [LAUGHS] I don't know what I can say about Black Mountain anymore. It's been a long time. Besides, after I left that Black Mountain, I've been to a lot of places. I've met too many people. And too many places. So, I've forgot about, seems to me I've forgot about Black Mountain. After that I've been to a lot of different places, different interesting places other than Black Mountain, so I don't really remember. Black Mountain to me was just a little scene to me. Right now.

MEH: Did you like the school?

HB: Yes, I did. Yes, I do like the school. [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: Any other memories. You said you've been a lot of other places. Where have you been?

HB: Yeah, I don't remember those other places. [UNINTEL] a lot of places I don't even remember. I would have gone back to Black Mountain College, but one reason is I didn't have the money. Besides, I can't get help from my people because my mother died. I don't have—All my other relatives, my brother and sisters they never went to school. They don't have no English. My father didn't go to school here, so I had no connection, no contact with them. There's no way of getting back, to helping me out. I stayed away from my home for quite a while.

MEH: But you live with your sister now? In Greasewood?

HB: Yes. Yes. My sister also was raised by her aunt, after our mother died. She was raised by her aunt. She never lived with my mother-in-law also. Never did. I just came back. When I lived in Santa Fe, I came back, so I had no place to live so I was living with different relatives here and there. Finally, I came back to my sister, so I'm staying over here now. Whenever I—I'm [UNINTEL] away.

MEH: And you told me, you were saying that you signed your early paintings "Harrison Begay," but there are three Harrison Begays now?

HB: Yeah. [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: And so how do you sign your paintings?

HB: Oh, there's about three Harrison Begays. There're three others. They used their name, Harrison Begay. But I use two different names. My Indian name. So that's the reason I keep my painting different, well-known, better than being mixed up with these other people, these other artists.

MEH: What is your Indian name?

HB: My Indian name is Haashké Yah Nijá (Haskay Jahne Yah).

MEH: And what does that mean?

HB: It means a warrior that went up to see what he has accomplished. A warrior who went to see what he has accomplished. That was given by, a name, to me by another warrior. He was a code talker. He said he went in the—he went killing the enemy at a distance, so he walked up to see what he has accomplished, so that's why he give me that name. The name, the reason I had the name, because I had no warrior's name. The reason is I had—they had Indian dance for me they call victorious dance, you know, or some people call them war dance. They gave me—they had performed that dance for me, so I didn't have any name, warrior name. So, he gave me that name because he's been a warrior. That's why. A warrior has to give you a name.

MEH: How old were you then when you had your Indian name? How old were you when you were given your Indian name?

HB: Well, I think I was about fifty years old when I got my Indian name. [LAUGHS] I didn't have it. I didn't have an Indian name though. But I did have Indian name though, but I remember one of my grandfather's brothers, one time I saw him, he said, "I haven't seen you when you're a little boy. Is your name Kee-bye [PH]?" "Yes, I'm Kee-bye." That was my childhood name. Kee-bye.

MEH: What does that mean?

HB: Oh, Little Gray Boy.

MEH: [INTERRUPTION] A little light-complexioned boy. Little gray boy?

HB: Yeah.

MEH: [INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT APPEARANCE].

HB: When I was in Normandy doing [SOUNDS LIKE: signal breakthrough], I was a casualty over there. I got hurt, you know. I fell down off a tree when I was in the Signal Corps. Yeah, fixing the lines. So, my outfit went to Paris. I didn't go there. I didn't go to Paris.

MEH: Because you were wounded?

HB: My outfit, my Signal Corps. I was in the Signal Corps. They went to Paris, but I didn't. I was in the hospital in England. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: Were you wounded badly?

HB: No. Well, I couldn't walk for quite a bit, maybe about a few weeks. The doctor told me to walk, so I started walking then. I couldn't walk. I hurt my hip. I start walking again.

MEH: The Signal Corps. Was this an Indian group, or was it—?

HB: No, it was—What [UNINTEL. SOUNDS LIKE: I made a mistake.] This person told me to join the Signal Corps, but I didn't know anything about it, so I just told the army that I was Signal Corps. I might use some of my Navajo language, you know. [UNINTEL. SOUNDS LIKE: My ear,] so I got into the wrong one. It's Marine Signal Corps. That's what I'm supposed to go in instead of in the army. Of course, I didn't care [LAUGHS]. At that time, I didn't care [UNINTEL]. I was happy to be in the army, that's all.

MEH: After you were out of the hospital, did you come directly back to this country?

HB: No, no, no, no. I went back to my outfit. They were over there in Germany, what they call—it's close to Belgium. I've forgotten the name of that place. That's where they got the line for the winter. It's close to Belgium. I forgot the name. It's a little [UNINTEL] city. That's where I was when I went back to my Signal Corps Company.

MEH: Do you—When you left Black Mountain and you went up to New York and Chicago, the cities—Washington, New York, Chicago, were you traveling alone?

HB: Yes, I'm traveling alone, all alone, yes.

MEH: Did you go to museums?

HB: Yeah, I went to museums, the big museum over there in Washington. I went. That's why I really went over there. I could—I couldn't spend all the day, but I just, I just went [UNINTEL]—I had to go a lot of places. I didn't have much time though in Washington. It's a lot to see. You have to stay there for a week if you want to see a lot of things. It was only one day. I think I—that's way up to that [LOOKS UP. POSSIBLY WASHINGTON MONUMENT] what do you call it, they show you.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING. GREAT NIECE JOINS THE INTEVIEW]

MEH: I want to tell you something. See, if you have any questions to ask him about going to that college. Why don't you tell her about the college? You just tell her.

HB: [LAUGHS]

MEH: You tell her about going to the college.

HB: [LAUGHS] She doesn't know what to say.

MEH: Let me see. What about—Maybe you could ask him how old he was? Why don't you ask him that?

CHILD: Grandpa, how old were you when you went there?

HB: I was about twenty, about twenty-two years old, something like that, when I went to college over there.

MEH: Do you have any other questions? Maybe you could ask him why he went?

CHILD: Why did you went? Why did you go?

HB: Why did I go? Because I got a scholarship over there. Do you know what a scholarship is? You don't know, huh? You study free. You learn something free, without paying for it.

MEH: You have to be very smart to get a scholarship.

CHILD: How did you go there? What towns did you go through? What towns did you go through? How many towns did you have to go through?

HB: Oh, you mean how many trains did I took over there? I don't remember what you're saying there. I mean, how did I travel over there?

CHILD: Yes.

HB: Well, I got in a bus. I traveled in a bus.

CHILD: How many towns did you have to go through?

HB: How many what?

CHILD: Towns.

HB: Oh, yes, a lot of towns.

CHILD: How many?

HB: I went to El Paso. And then I went to Oklahoma. Then I went to Arkansas, where President Hoover was living over there. Arkansas. What is the name of that capital of Arkansas?

MEH: Oh, I can't think.

CHILD: Lincoln? President Lincoln?

MEH: President Clinton lived in Arkansas.

HB: I stopped over there at the capital of Arkansas. Yeah. President Clinton, yeah.

MEH: Yeah, President Clinton was from there. [OVERTALK] How many days did it take you?

CHILD: How many days did it take me?

HB: How many days did I go?

CHILD: Yes.

HB: I stayed there—it wasn't about two days I went to. I was in Arkansas for a while, then over there, and then I went to North Carolina. Asheville, North Carolina.

CHILD: About how many miles did you go?

HB: Oh, god. I don't know how many miles a day I made, but [LAUGHS] I was on the bus. About a hundred and something—fifty miles—from Arkansas to Asheville, something like that. It was about one day, I think.

MEH: Why don't you ask him if there were any Navaho there?

CHILD: Were there any Navaho?

HB: There's no Navaho over there in that college.

CHILD: Except for you.

HB: No. There were some—There're some Cherokee around there, but they didn't go—not at the school, though. Just in town around there. Cherokee Indian.

CHILD: How many people were there?

HB: Oh, there were a lot of people. I didn't count them. [LAUGHS] Too many people like it is around here. That's like you go to Albuquerque, you see a lot of people over there. It's like that, a lot of people in those towns.

MEH: Maybe you can ask him if he felt lonely with no Navaho there.

CHILD: Did you feel sad? Or did you feel happy?

HB: Yeah, I was happy, yeah. I wasn't lonely. I made a lot of friends over there.

CHILD: How many?

HB: I didn't count them. [LAUGHS]

CHILD: You didn't count them again. What were their names?

HB: I forgot their names. Too many different names.

CHILD: Just their first names.

HB: John. Paul. I forgot their names. I can't remember.

MEH: Maybe you might like to know what he studied.

CHILD: What did you study? Navaho culture? Or did you study—

HB: No, I didn't study Navaho culture. I studied history, I studied architect, I studied mathematic. That's what I studied mostly over there. What are you going to study when you go? Law? Are you going to be a lawyer?

CHILD: No.

HB: [LAUGHS] What are you going to be, a rodeo man, rodeo girl?

CHILD: Yes.

HB: You going to be a rodeo girl, huh? [LAUGHS] A boy conqueror. You're going to be a conqueror, huh? [LAUGHS] Okay.

MEH: Maybe you should ask him about the mountains and ask him if they're like the mountains here. Move a little closer, so you stay in the picture. Good. Ask him about the mountains there, if there were any mountains.

CHILD: Were there any mountains, like these mountains around here?

HB: Yeah, yeah, those mountains. They call Blue Ridge. They're not real big mountains. A lot of trees there, nice timber trees over there. A lot of oak trees, all different kind of trees. A lot of those other animals over there. Deer and little skunk and things like that. And little wildcats in that area, in the mountains.

CHILD: You mean like—

HB: And a lot of birds too. All kind of little birds.

CHILD: Little birds, hummingbirds?

HB: Yeah, little birds. And they've got flowers on that mountain. I guess that's all.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

CHILD: How many children—Were there children over there? When you graduate?

HB: I didn't graduate there. I was going to school, but I didn't go back to school. I didn't graduate, go back to school. I went to the army instead of going back to school the next year, the following year.

MEH: There was a big war then and he had to go in the army. He was wounded.

HB: That's 194—When was Pearl Harbor?

MEH: Pearl Harbor was in 1941.

HB: I went in 1942.

CHILD: And they have a movie *Pearl Harbor*.

HB: Did you see *Pearl Harbor*? You did. Yeah. I haven't seen *Pearl Harbor* though.

CHILD: You haven't seen the movie? I have the movie.

HB: Yeah, I know you had the movie. You have to give it to me so I can see it. I'll take it home. Yeah, they had the movie they went to. They wanted to let me see it, but I haven't seen it yet.

MEH: Maybe you can ask him what kind of dancing they did?

CHILD: What kind of dancing did they do? Did? What kind of dancing did they do?

HB: What kind of basketball?

CHILD: Dancing!

HB: Dancing? Oh yeah, there was some kind of dancing there. I've forgot, though. There were different kind of dancing. They used to have all different kinds. Not the way we dance. That's a different kind of dance. I forgot. Yeah, I know there was some kind of dance I learned over there. I've forgot though. Different kind of dance.

[AT END OF TAPE IS BRIEF FILMING OF BEGAY'S SISTER AND
FAMILY IN THE HOGAN BUT NOT SOUND]

[END OF INTERVIEW. END OF TRANSCRIPT.]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]