Interviewee: JOAN COUCH SIHVONEN [JOAN POTTER LOVELESS]
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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NOTE: Joan Potter Loveless was first registered at Black Mountain under her maiden name Couch. After her marriage to Oli Sihvonen, she was registered as Joan Couch Sihvonen. She later adopted her mother's maiden name Potter as her own and no longer used Couch. Her second husband was David Loveless.

[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION] I'll give all the names that you're known by. Couch. Sihvonen. Loveless. You now use the name Joan Loveless, professionally.

JCS: Potter.

MEH: Joan Potter. That was –

JCS: Potter is my actual middle name, which was my mother's maiden name.

MEH: So you use Joan Potter professionally.

JCS: Joan Potter Loveless.

MEH: Joan Potter Loveless. So now we're identified. Joan, how did you come to be at Black Mountain College?

JCS: My mother had heard of it. She had read of it in Louis Adamic's <u>My America</u>. She wanted my brother, my very bright brother, to go there. He wasn't really interested but it sounded to me like one of the first civilized places I had heard about. So I got involved and went.

MEH: Where were you living?

JCS: In Texas.

MEH: In Texas? Let's see, that was 1944, according to my records.

JCS: Possibly. You're better at that than I am.

MEH: So why would your mother have been – What did your family do? Why would your mother have been reading Louis Adamic?

JCS: Well, she was a reader. [LAUGHS]

MEH: Why would this sort of thing – Had you been to public or private schools?

JCS: Public.

MEH: What did your parents do?

JCS: My father was a contractor and, in the midst of the Depression, was doing various kinds of contracting things, which I don't really know much about. But my parents went to Texas from Virginia, where I was born and one of my brothers was born. They moved just before the Depression when my father was a successful young businessman for something or other – I don't even know what. Things went illy [?], and he didn't continue doing that and we moved from place to place all over Texas, which was never really a home but was very well-loved. Black Mountain was really my first home that I identified with, aside from my family home. I don't know what other explanation. Our family was a very, a very, I guess you'd say bookish and introverted and separate family from the life around us. I was not expected to stay there. It was thought I would go off into the real world, which I did. That's sort of how it happened. It just sounded – It was the first collection of identifications of a

place or school that seemed to be saying things that really mattered. So that it just seemed as though it had been made for my purposes, so I went.

MEH: Do you remember anything about the application process?

JCS: Hmm. Not really. I don't, actually. I did have a bit of a scholarship. I helped in the office. It was quite fun. I helped Albers design concert programs on the typewriter and got my first lessons in consequence space and that sort of thing. But I just, I don't remember that. I don't remember anything in particular about it.

MEH: Do you remember how you first traveled to the college?

JCS: It was by train. I remember coming into Black Mountain. It was by train.

MEH: This would have been during the War.

JCS: At the end of it, yes.

MEH: The last year.

JCS: Right. [AFFIRMATIVE]. Then the student enrollment – I don't know what it was, but it wasn't large then, certainly. Then the people came back from the War, and that was when Oli came there. He heard about it while in – I guess maybe on the ship coming back from Europe he heard about it, and decided to check it out.

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

JCS: Yes. They were very good ones. I don't know quite how to put it, but I liked the people, I liked the place. Of course, I now realize -- I didn't think of it then -- but it seemed like a place -- the old illustrations when there is a world, a world in an old etching, where everything is complete, a total world is envisioned like

on a cloud or an island? That was what it seemed to me. It was a place separate from the rest of the world, which had wonderful qualities. I mean, I didn't exactly know what they were yet, but I liked the people. Of course, I was already approving of it because I had read the descriptions of what their aims were and their attitudes and so forth. It was the first time I had been around a large group of people with whom I had a lot in common, because I had grown up as a very separate person and not very much part of the community. My mother was a rather separate person and sort of an intellectual and an odd thinker. So I hadn't been in that congenial setting. It seemed that the focus of attention was on mostly important things, large and small, and it just was very comfortable.

MEH: Did you have any idea what you wanted to study?

JCS: Oh, well I was always interested in writing. I mean words have always been the, my most comfortable tools, and most effective way of doing things, so I suppose that was what I intended. I took M.C.'s class and such, but I wasn't at all ready to write then – at all. I was much less sophisticated than the general run of students. I mean, I knew I belonged, but I had sort of come from the wilderness to a place that was very comfortable but wasn't a place that I was already used to. Let's see, I was interested in, in the visual arts as well. I think one of my imaginings as a young person was that I wanted to work with – I imagined myself working in the midst of color. But that was about as definite as it was, but I did take classes with Albers.

MEH: When you arrived at the college, how did you decide what to take? Did you have someone to work with?

JCS: Eddie Lowinsky was my – what was it called?

MEH: Advisor?

JCS: Advisor. Right. Yes. I was very fond of him. So I suppose he helped, and I remember talking with Albers. I had a gold ring that had been my grandfather's that I wore, a simple gold band. I said I would like to study drawing, and he said, "Well if you can draw that ring you're wearing, you'll be doing very well." I did take a drawing class, so I think it was sort of like that.

MEH: What do you remember about Josef Albers' drawing class?

JCS: It was, of course, a marvelous class. It was interesting how he sort of directed you. He, by his enthusiasm, focused students on the subject, the model or the cup or whatever it was, and his joy in this communication between a person, a drawer or a seer, and a thing they were curious about, was marvelous. It was, it was great fun. Well, that was the beginning of – the first instance of his focus on helping you learn to see. Not helping you learn to see, but helping you learn to see – begin to comprehend opening your visual apparatus to get in touch with a thing that you were drawing. So I think that was marvelous. I also posed some for the – most, most people did – for the drawing class, and that was interesting too. You know, he would say how the knee goes, you know. "Look at people, look at them. Don't just stand around being monotonous. Look at people." It was marvelous.

MEH: I understand that he could be sort of brutal to his models, and you really became an object. Look at, you know, big hips. Long arms. Whatever. You had to sort of distance yourself from his comments sometimes.

JCS: [AFFIRMATIVE] About as far as he went in a negative direction with me was "See this 15th century tummy," or something like that. But no, I didn't happen to experience that. I was lucky, I guess.

MEH: Did you do most of your drawing in that class, or did you like have assignments to take home?

JCS: Actually I think the design class was more a class where you did work outside and brought it in in response to a sort of a situation assignment using different materials, going for different accomplishments and combinations of materials or whatever. But the drawing class, as I remember it, I mean people drew but not as assignments, I think.

MEH: What do you remember about his – the design class?

JCS: The first thing that pops into my mind is Ruth Asawa. [LAUGHS] She in a way was a sort of demonstration of one of the very good, at least, demonstrations of a design class, because she – with her agile pen and her – she just was very excited about that kind of work. It was this matter of opening up to the visual world – being, learning to see, learning to look. The materials of the class tempted your attention, and that was the idea. I mean, of course the way the classes went, the content of the classes, is very familiar.

MEH: Are there particular exercises that stand out that you remember?

JCS: Well, I'm not even sure whose it was – whether perhaps it was one of Ruth's. Things – marvelous collections of stones, and wax, and gravel, things which were separated from a usefulness, which were just materials that were there in order to be looked at or in order to have some kind of thing going on with another material. I'm trying to think of the particular things, but people did work very intensely on this. They got very involved in finding materials, outlandish or otherwise, and bringing them in in this beautiful presentation. It was wonderful.

MEH: Did you take his color class?

JCS: I'm not even sure if I did. It was so much a part of what was going on and I knew people who were taking it. I mean Oli was taking it. I guess I must have. I do remember working in my weaving definitely with his sort of exercises, like working with bands of color, with stripes of color working until the color had accomplished, what it could accomplish there, and this in weaving would be a little different from collage or painting. Then beginning with a new color and letting its relationship to the first color affect how long it needed to go on. This kind of thing. He wasn't actually teaching that, but that was the result of the way he taught in the specific lessons that he did.

MEH: How do you remember Albers as a person?

JCS: Well, I found him delightful because I loved what he was doing and I had no – I know that some people felt threatened by him, or didn't enjoy him, weren't comfortable with him. But I was so open to and valued so much what he was opening up for me that it didn't really matter. I was just very grateful to him for thinking the whole damn thing up. [LAUGHS] I can't think – As I mentioned to

you, I – later, maybe this isn't the time to talk about that-- but later I taught in a kindergarten in Washington, D.C. – the Georgetown Day School. I became involved with the children and was fascinated with what was happening with them, being so eager to do fun stuff and such. I began just watching and gradually – and playing with them, and doing things with them, and gradually began to be conscious that they understood – the ways that they taught themselves were related to the ways that Albers talked about learning to see. I realized that they – they did this very naturally. They started out – They learned a new piece of something, they enlarged on it, they went ahead with it, and I began to devise ways – Well, I realized that their natural ways of learning were going to be interrupted in school, unless they were somehow, unless they could learn techniques that would protect them, so I began inventing them and they were directly from my experience with Albers's whole approach to not a specific study but – It was quite marvelous because I decided that I should somehow break down the kinds of material they would have in the first grade, learning to read and such. Break it down in some way so that they could learn it in the same natural way that they ordinarily learn new things. So I did that. We would do drawing classes. I would draw a line and let them look at, study the line. Then I would erase it and say, tell them, "Look, remember what you see," would erase it, and they would all be very proud that they had isolated this line, that they had seen it, and they had comprehended it. We went on to more complex forms. It just took the chaos out of what they were seeing. They could be presented with an unlikely thing like a "Z" or written loops or

something, and understand that it possessed curves and closeness and lengths. Not verbally, but they understood it because this was the same kind of seeing that they'd been doing ever since they first opened their eyes. So it worked wonderfully, and they learned to read so easily. Their teacher had to find other things to do with them when they were in the first grade. It was a great success. We did it with other things. I tried to do it with oh, with listening, for instance, not just seeing. We would go out in the woods – the school was in the middle of Washington, where NBC is now, I think – and we'd go out and sit in the woods. I'd have them close their eyes and what could they hear? could they hear people back at the school? and they would listen. They became analysts of the first order. Soon someone said "Oh, I hear a fire truck going over there," and they would listen farther and farther into the city. They were delighted – that was the other thing, communicating with each other. They were delighted to become able to discover something exciting and share it with their friends. They learned to trust communication in a way. That was very nice. They learned to draw a map of their school and all kinds of things, exercises, that I came up with, based on what I saw them doing. Anyway, in a way, a lot of the things I remember about working with Albers are – I see through the experience of using his attitudes in these, in these other situations.

MEH: Did you take weaving with Anni Albers?

JCS: Yes.

MEH: What do you remember about that? How did she conduct her class? What sort of things did you do?

JCS: Well, it was a very fine class. I really enjoyed it. It also started out with that kind of basic tuning in to seeing the materials that you're working with. The first class, as I remember, was we used a paper and a straight pin, and we – maybe a piece of blotting – no, just a plain piece of paper. We did things to it. Poked holes in it. Disturbed the paper – getting across her idea that weaving was basically – one basic thing about it was texture. Then we did the same thing with, worked with blotting paper. Yes, blotting paper. Distressing it. Making patterns with a pin. Then the class was actually in two sections. One was learning the technical names of things – the constructions of weaves and such, where you'd look at patterns representing thread, thread structures, and the other was just starting to weave on a loom. If a loom was warped, you started weaving on it until it was finished. Then you experienced warping the loom. It was, it was a very good class, and I found it very helpful. I was particularly – all of my weaving, almost all of it – after Black Mountain was tapestries, because that was just what I wanted to do. I was interested in using the weaving to study landscape, or space and form in a very simple way, and so I really wanted to weave tapestries – which was not Anni's way of seeing things. I don't know that she especially approved of that. I didn't do that there, but after I left and when I came here.

MEH: What did she approve of?

JCS: Let's see. Well, she approved of hard work, of interesting results, of using color well and doing good weaving. She liked my weaving there. I mean, I think I was a good student. But she was a little, I mean she had had – This is a very

casual look at Anni. I'm not sure I'm the one to give her the best review. But she had her experience. As I would see it, I think, she was into – Well, for one thing, she definitely liked using the weaving for very practical results. For good sound in a room, for that kind of thing. We did exercises, and that's a very good learning thing so it was very valid. She would have us imagine designing curtains for a theater or what elements would have to go into that, both visual and sound and things like that. She wasn't – In other words, I guess she simply wasn't, as exciting, as excited, a teacher as Albers was. God, I'm dying of thirst. Albers would – [BREAK IN RECORDING]

MEH: The Albers story.

JCS: This was a very fun thing that happened in the drawing class. I can't even remember exactly what was being drawn or what was going on, but he got so excited about something that one of us saw in the model or in the process of drawing, he got up and just jumped up and down. He just was so delighted he could hardly contain himself. In general, that's how I found him. I enjoyed his relationship to his work, and because that was good, was skillful, it was a good relationship to his students. I mean that's the way it seemed to me, anyway.

MEH: Were you aware of his own work as an artist? Of what he was doing?

JCS: Just it appeared around. I don't remember, I mean I never saw him painting. I don't remember exactly, when he was working on something and then it was being shown. No, I don't. It was just, that's what Albers does. It was a new kind of painting to me. The only abstract painting I had seen was when my brother was in New York for a few years when we were in high school. He brought

back pictures of abstract painting that he had seen in galleries in New York, and that was the only – But there was none of that. Now there are abstract paintings, of course, in every corner, but there weren't then, actually. If you weren't in New York or in some museum-inhabited town, then you didn't see that. So it was new to me. It made sense, because it was sort of a time when you were getting at the essence of things and so distilled, very simple work made a lot of sense, even to us.

MEH: Now, at one point, Anni Albers left and Franzisca – for a sabbatical – and Franzisca Mayer came to teach. Do you remember her? Did you take anything with her?

JCS: Just vaguely. Not sure that I did. I think probably not. I did know her. She was a sweet person. But Trude Guermonprez, I did study with some and we were very good friends, after. I guess she visited us here. But at the time of the big split, a lot of those people – Bobbie and Ted and Trude and these people stopped here to visit us on their escape route to the West Coast. {LAUGHS]

MEH: How would you compare her teaching to Anni's? Was it similar? Trude's.

JCS: Trude's. Well, that's interesting. I guess, when I think of it that way, it was almost as though Anni was trying to make a system of teaching like Albers had, and my feeling would be that Trude was just teaching weaving. Anni in a way was sort of trying to make a whole – I don't know what the word would be – a whole cultural unit out of it, somehow. Of course, they had come from very different weaving career experiences before, I'm sure. Trude was much more relaxed. I'm not even sure I was in a class of Trude's, but the people were

students and teachers. You were involved in the same process in a way. I mean, I wasn't involved with the science teachers' concerns and interests, but the people in the fields that you were involved in, you sort of knew what was going on even if you weren't in the class. Especially if a friend or a husband was taking art classes, also. So I'm not actually sure about that, and, of course, Trude was a friend, so I knew her work that way.

MEH: Who were other serious weaving students when you were there?

JCS: Oh, I was going to ask you – Willie Joseph?

MEH: Yes, I'll talk later, off – I don't want to put all of that on tape.

JCS: He was a marvelous student. He is the one who – he's gotten tremendously involved in the technique, in some difficult techniques. He was doing weaving in which the weaving surface was also a surface that went up and down, where the weaving left the plane. I don't know what that's called, but it became a sort of ridged weaving, very intricate, very lovely, when woven in black and white threads, mixtures. He studied it like Einstein. He was very intent and very much in love with this method when he was working on it. Let's see, there was one male student – I can't think of his name – who wove very elegant things. But I don't remember in particular.

MEH: What courses did you take other than art courses?

JCS: Well, I took Eddie Lowinsky's Renaissance course, which I was not prepared for at all. I hadn't read much Renaissance material at that point. I took a class with Dr. Miller – Do you remember his first name?

MEH: Herbert.

JCS: Herbert. Oh, interesting. I've wondered occasionally if I've seen a book of his in my history book searches. Oh, and, of course, the Moby Dick class with what's his name.

MEH: Kazin. [OVERTALK] Was Kazin there?

JCS: Kazin, Alfred Kakin, yes. That was – Oh, oh and M.C.'s husband, Bill Levi. I enjoyed his class. I can't even remember what it was. We got into a wonderful argument about the "isness" of things, though. [LAUGHS] But that was very interesting to me. I was sort of – I don't know, at a particular stage of starting to study, I guess, but I was not actually taking a course in order to learn the material of the course. I was doing it in order to become acquainted with more situations, you know, in a way so I could set up my direction. So I wasn't learning a group of things so that I had a set of learnings accomplished. It was sort of a general introduction to possible futures and things. But Alfred Kazin was marvelous. It was just an enthralling class, talking about Moby Dick, because he had the same depth and intensity of Albers. I mean, that was – it was a marvelous thing for young students to – With both of them there was an element of drama in the way they presented their material, the way they communicated it and shared it. There was a whole sense of drama. It wasn't mechanical. Probably Anni's was more mechanical. But the others were – I mean those two, for instance, were – I guess it was the sort of the essence of teaching, the kind of thing that goes along under the material that you're using as communication, but you're actually communicating something else. I won't try to – [LAUGHS] Let's see. So – Dr. Miller was – I wasn't familiar with his

history world, or particularly interested in it. Well, I took a class with M.C., a writing class, and I wasn't ready to do that either but it was interesting. I'm sure I got something from it. But the most important man at Black Mountain – can you guess? Max Dehn. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: You were going to talk about Max Dehn.

JCS: Yes. Max Dehn was an incredible phenomenon. He was just marvelous. Oh, I should have thought about it before, because I can't – He introduced young people to a whole world. It was like he was – I'd never thought of this before, but maybe it'll work. That he was like – he was a creation of another time or perhaps many times, who just happened to reappear in this time and come to our school, and by doing that he – It was like he gave us all kinds of other worlds to have feeling of. A very, just a – You never met him, I guess. He loved young people . He loved to talk to new people. He was very much able to be interested in young people's ideas and experiences and interests. Well, you've probably heard. Usually when there was a new student, before very many days had gone by, he had taken them for a walk up to the pasture? Gotten a little acquainted with them. He was a very small, slight man with big eyes, wispy hair, something of an elfin face. It was quite amazing, because he was willing at any time to sit down with a student and talk about some very important idea – like love or truth. He could do this. He was so interested in people and in young people, and so enthralled with the idea that everyone was going ahead with loving the world and culture. He just embodied these things. It was a wonderful experience to know him, because he embodied so much.

We were very good friends. In fact he became my unofficial stepfather – godfa- – no, stepfather. My daughter, Kimry, became his goddaughter. We just were – I imagine most people at Black Mountain were very, very fond of him. I remember he would tell stories. Oh, there was a man, a friend of his, professor from Chicago, I think, came. He was telling me about this fellow. He said that when they both were teaching I think in Chicago before he came to Black Mountain, he said they were sitting in the dining room and watching the young people come in, and the girls – watching the girls come in – and looking at each one, and said "No," "Yes," "Yes," and they were deciding which ones had souls. [LAUGHS]. This is a Dehnism. When the girls came in. " Yes, yes. I think she does." He started this class of mathematics for artists, which I didn't take, but Oli took it. He decided that I had a mathematical mind and started me on it in a tutorial. It took quite a long time to convince him that he really was flying me too high, and I couldn't really keep up with it, but it was beautiful at the same time, introducing me to these concepts of – we were just talking, these concepts of numbers and number spaces. But that's the kind of person he was. He'd just thought I needed a little special attention about mathematics, and so he gave it to me. He was a joy. A joy indeed.

MEH: Do you think at the time you were really aware of the eminence of these refugees in the community – like Albers and Dehn and Lowinsky and –

JCS: Yes. [AFFIRMATIVE]. Yes, we were, and we just thought it was one of the beauties of Black Mountain, and it was one of the things we were incredibly lucky for, and also quite clever to have come to. I mean we did get ourselves

there, and then we felt very fortunate. I always felt that the combination of somewhat idealistic young people planning to be idealistic adults and that it was an incredible combination. It was the one gift that came out of all that negativity – that because of that, we were – These people came there and, I mean, how lucky can you get to enjoy the results of that – because of the terrible things, they happened to come to this country and because of the principles, the interests and so forth of certain people beginning the school, and the atmosphere was created that drew them there. The people who were running the school were able to – [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: Do you think you were really aware at the time of their – of the plight of the refugees? The situation in Europe – Well certainly after the War you would have been aware.

JCS: [AFFIRMATIVE] Yes. I would not have been, would not have known as much about it as some students, probably, because I was not a current events person. I knew in general but I wasn't probably as aware as I should have been of the details of what was happening in the world. On the other hand, I lost a friend who was flying over there during that. We certainly knew what was going on. We were conscious that it was an amazing thing that they had survived and been able to come here, and that what was important about them had survived all they'd been through. That was part of it, I guess.

MEH: You had a bed in the lodge and then a study in the Studies Building?

JCS: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: What do you think was the effect, as a student, of having your own – I mean, usually you share a room in a dorm, the college. What do you think was the effect of having your own little workspace at the college, as a student?

JCS: Well, I think it depended on where the student was in the process of learning to really work. I used my study less than Elaine Urbain did. I mean she – Oh, and what was the name of that marvelous girl who was writing a book? I remember her study. Oh, what was –

MEH: Was it Peggy – ?

JCS: Yes.

MEH: Coe?

JCS: Not Coe.

MEH: That was her married name.

JCS: Peggy Bennett, right. I remember it. I remember her study. I don't know if this typewriter was on a little table, a desk, or on the floor. Probably on a little table. I had the impression that these sheets of typewritten prose just floating out from it. It was marvelous. Ruth and Elaine, who were friends and whose studies I saw in the natural course of things, they had stuff all over – things, papers. They were totally involved in this. I was at a different stage. I was absorbing – I mean now I would say that I was absorbing and developing ideas and attitudes internally. Il wasn't turning those things into products. At all. I mean very little. Obviously I did some. But a lot of my Black Mountain experience was internally mental, and the work I did was not terribly important. It was the experience, what I was learning from all these people, and the

combinations of them and the combinations of the people and the geographic place and the whole – It was very important to me, one of the most important things, being in a community of people whom I felt I was at least on the same planet with. I had been very much of an outsider. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING] I'd never thought of this before, so I don't know how it will come out. But I think that it was the combination of this, this place, which was built around an intent and an attitude – or that should be plural – and these people, and all of their different focuses on the various arts and study. It was really the experience of being, of witnessing all that was going on. Well, it was creating a society, for me. I mean, I had met all of these characters in books, but I hadn't met them in the flesh before. This, of course, would mean mostly – well, not just the teachers, but anyway, the human society of the place was very stimulating. The life, the community life, was also, and it was very fulfilling. It seemed that everything from the cornmeal mush we had for breakfast to the very wonderful parties we gave and concerts, when we would decorate, recreate, the whole dining hall to make – everything was of a piece. Of course, it wasn't, but this was something that I had needed and finally had found, a community that was real, that was concerned with things and composed of people – things that made sense. For me it – in a way I always felt that Black Mountain was my first home, and it was the first time I was – I mean it was – I had my small family and then there was nothing until I had the Black Mountain family. I don't, I don't know if that's exactly what I was trying to get out before. The material – Of course the, the art teaching turned out to be my field, and

that I began working with right away. But the other things, this history and such, were – that was still in the future. I mean, history has been my other great interest. My tendency is to look backwards, and that's where history is. [LAUGHS]

[END OF RECORDING ON TAPE 1; TAPE 2 BEGINS]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION] Joan, did you take any courses with M.C.?

JCS: Yes. I did. I don't remember a word of it. [LAUGHS] I think – I probably for a fairly short time, but I was, I didn't do much in the class. I don't remember it. There wasn't anything exciting going on for me, as there was in the art classes.

MEH: What was M.C. like as a community member, as a person?

JCS: Well, she was fun. Sort of a verbal enthusiast, and nice sense of humor. She was a very congenial person. I mean, she wasn't the kind of person that was useful to me at that point.

MEH: What about the Dreiers? Do you have particular memories of them?

JCS: Oh, yes. I was very fond of the Dreiers. We used to go up to the teacher's – up to their houses for Sunday supper. We'd make a picnic and go somewhere to someone's house. Or students getting together, but I used to often eat with the Lowinskys. Bobbie and I were sort of friends and used to do little things together. What was it? Oh, I guess Molly Gregory and I were making a silver tray, maybe <u>for</u> Bobbie. Molly made this wonderful framework, and then I sewed out of a linen these little cradles – hammocks – for the silver, and that was a project with Bobbie. But she was a very elegant and simple woman, and

very charming. She was a very dancing kind of person. Well, she was up – in a way perhaps the person I was closest to in a personal way – aside from Dehn – there. Ted used to – we used to go on hikes, groups of us, up into the mountains. I didn't study anything with Ted. He was just around. So I really knew him mostly at meals, at their house on Sundays and on hikes. Very, very fond of him too, but Bobbie I was especially fond of. They both came to see Oli and me when we spent a five-month summer up on the edge of the mountain, up there by the Lawrence Ranch, the Hawk Ranch. Bobbie and I corresponded after Black Mountain, but not in recent years at all. I was happy to hear that she was a lively 92-year-old.

MEH: Ninety-five.

JCS: No kidding.

MEH: She's from a family of long-lived women, so she's looking forward to a hundred.

JCS: Wow.

MEH: The college was fairly isolated. In fact it was isolated from any urban center or whatever. What did you do for entertainment? That you're willing to talk about on tape. [LAUGHTER]

JCS: Right. Let's see. Of course, things were very busy. There wasn't a great – there never was a shortage of occupation or entertainment, because I mean we had concerts and events happening a lot. If nothing else, there would be just evening gatherings, maybe – was it Saturdays? Eddie Woldin – Judd Woldin played the piano and we danced. There were big parties. But the

entertainment was just being alive in that environment, actually. We would go into – what was the town? Asheville. On shopping trips to go to the store where we could get second-hand boys' shirts, which we were starting to wear. Or leather for making our sandals. Several of us would go in, and we'd buy a bottle of wine and some crackers and a little glass jar of cheese. II guess we would get off the bus at Black Mountain or something and then we would wander – occupy an afternoon wandering home along the road, sitting down occasionally to open our wine [LAUGHS]. Really wild living! Such simple things as that. Then just the sociabilities of a group of young people. We would go to the stream near – I can't remember quite where that was – to swim. There were places to walk around. We did go on hikes up into the far mountains. We didn't individually entertain. It was a group, a group thing. Well, that isn't quite true. Of course, we had small groups of people got together but that was a very simple kind of entertainment, just enjoying the setting and the cast of characters, basically.

MEH: Do you remember any parties in particular?

JCS: Hmm.

MEH: With a particular theme or interest?

JCS: Oh, I remember decorating for one in the Dining Room for a big dance, I guess, a big party of some sort. Someone got great wide sheets of brown kitchen wrapping paper, wide sheets. I don't know exactly. I guess there were intermittent posts around the inside of the Dining Hall, and we completely transformed the shape of the building with this paper, making angular

arrangements of the paper on the posts. I remember that one particularly. But I think we quite often did – We always dressed for I guess – I don't know. Did we dress for dinner or just for weekend dinners? I can't remember now. But that was a very nice thing. Same people, same cast, same room, but we all appeared in our guise as concert goers or party goers or such, and that was nice.

MEH: Did you take any courses in bookbinding?

JCS: No. But I loved Johanna dearly. I should have.

MEH: Were you there when Jalowetz died?

JCS: Yes.

MEH: Do you have any memories particularly of that evening?

JCS: Oh, definitely. Let's see. Well, I sang in his chorus. I mean, it was a very democratic chorus, and I sang tenor or alto. There were a few basses, but very few in-betweens. That was marvelous, just incredible. Again, being in this – sharing, witnessing who he was and who he was in relation to music. It was really an amazing thing. These people experiences. I mean, of course, these individuals had human traits too, but it was like witnessing the art of the past and the whole culture of the past, because these people were part of it. It really came through them. I'm getting on pretty dangerous descriptive ground, but it was a great shortcut for young people who weren't in Europe, going to great cathedrals and experiencing these things directly. They were communicated to us through these unusual people, very talented, very devoted, dedicated people – specialists in some world or other. To share music

with Jalo was quite amazing. There were just moments when it was pure magic and the world stood still. Then [TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

MEH: We were talking about Jalowetz's death.

JCS: Well, as I say, it was a marvelous – Again, he was a figure, an image, that represented something in this pantheon of – [INTERRUPTION] We're thinking about Jalo. I was just realizing that again – This is really interesting to focus on these things because most of this hasn't occurred to me quite like this before. But thinking of him, and people like Johanna and, well, a lot of people. Of course Dehn, that they were not just people. They were symbols of people throughout history. For me, I think, it was part of my awakening connection to history. These people became for me – they inhabited both the present and the past for me, and they represented a whole world of things that I was interested in and that I would be pursuing, that I didn't yet know. They were both doers and statues. They really were a tremendously rich connection to the past of culture. Really. Jalo was definitely one of those. When he directed the chorus, he just brought out singing. He was a great pleasure and delight, and I didn't know him personally. I mean, I didn't happen to have shared much of a family kind of thing – with Johanna a little bit because it just happened. But not with Jalo. So he was just a very important figure in our whole play that was going on there. When that happened, we were just in a tremendous state of shock. I remember groups of us, twos and threes of us, were just walking throughout the night practically, just up and down and around. It was a very dramatic thing, a very significant person this had happened to. So, then Eddie

Lowinsky started planning to do the Requiem in memory of him, and that became a very important thing. That was wonderful. Eddie – I was very fond of Eddie. He was a very sweet man. He was sort of – he was my advisor and sort of – somewhat fatherly figure. He was very good and very musical, but he didn't have the majesty of Jalo. That was the difference. So that was a very fine period, doing that singing.

MEH: How was this sort of thing handled within the community? I'm sure for many of the young people, this was their first experience of an unexpected death.

JCS: It was for me. Well soon followed by my friend in the Air Corps. I don't remember much more than that – just that the whole community was in a state of shock, and there was a great feeling of love for Jalo. I mean, I didn't know anyone. No doubt not everyone felt as romantically about this figure as some of us did. I don't remember anything else in particular about that.

MEH: What was Ruth Asawa like as a student?

JCS: Let's see. She was a delight. She was this little person who was just always busy with her things. I think of her with the paper and the newsprint and the pen and very, very tuned-in, of course, to what she was doing. Just enchanted by this process of drawing, which she was so good at. She did a wonderful drawing of Dehn, which maybe is in your book, her drawing, it might be –

MEH: That was Elaine's drawing.

JCS: Oh, was it? Oh. Okay. Huh. Okay. Anyway, well Elaine was very much the same. Different personalities, but she also was – you had the feeling that she was in a state of being charmed, that she was in this state of creation, creating

these wonderful things. They both seemed to just adore it so, the drawing process. That's the way it seemed to me. I saw – Well Ruth and Oli were good artist friends too. That's right. Ruth made a – When she first started making those little wiggly line things, Oli started doing drawings, wiggly-line drawings we called them. She was working with wire and she made for Kimry, for my daughter who was then little, made this wonderful piece, little wire sculpture. No. Oh, excuse me. That cat minds, knows the word no. She and Elaine especially, because they both – Oh, I remember Ruth saying – maybe she has said it to you – that people thought always thought they were talking about these deep and important things, and really they were just giggling and looking at everybody and gossiping and wondering about people. Which was nice. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: Okay, so let's go. You were married while you were at the college.

JCS: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: To Oli Sihvonen. He came after you were already there?

JCS: Yes, he came when I went back after – I took a semester off and worked.

MEH: Did you go back to Texas for that summer and semester?

JCS: [AFFIRMATIVE]. Yes. I worked where I had worked before I went to school. For the Air Corps – as a secretary kind of thing. Then I came back and that's when the male persons, the guys [LAUGHS], came back from the War. Oli was one of them. By the end of that semester we were engaged, so to speak. We went to Texas and were married, and went back there for that summer. I was, I think, working in the office or something. Oli was studying in the summer

session. Not quite sure about this chronology, but hopefully it doesn't matter desperately because I really can't –

MEH: So what was it like to be a married student at the college? Did they have facilities for married students to live?

JCS: Well, yes. There was a little building before the – what the South – what were those cabins called, South Hall, or – ?

MEH: North and South Lodge.

JCS: Lodge, right. The far one, the one away from the lake. There was another little building there and I remember we had a room there. I remember it was very strange to be there not as a student. I felt very disconnected. It was rather a strange thing. Oh, that's right. We left for a year or a semester. Oli's parents spent much of the winter that year in Finland and we decided to go and raise a flock of chickens, which we did at their poultry farm.

MEH: This was in Connecticut?

JCS: In Connecticut. Oh, yes. Then we went back, I guess in the fall, and our daughter, Kimry, was born at the college. There were two buildings way up at the very top of the college, where any buildings were above the office and the faculty residences, which were called Last Chance and Next to Last Chance, two government buildings, those pre-fab buildings. We lived in one of those and that was when our neighbor was Dehn. Dehn lived – We lived in half of it and Dehn and Mrs. Dehn – Toni – lived in the other half, when she was there. Oh, the idea was – That was better, because we – There was another configuration in which I was a member of the college, and I had my little math

– Dehn was trying to teach me math. Oh, there was a – Who was the physics teacher? The female physics teacher?

MEH: Oh, Natasha Goldowski?

JCS: Natasha Goldowski. Mrs. – her mother. Little Mama Goldowski. Wonderful little woman, too. She gave me a tutorial in French and baked her brioche in my oven, while she gave it, and so I evolved another life there, which wasn't immediately as a student but in all other senses was part of the community. That was that period. It was just the atmosphere of the college but not literally studying. I don't think I was taking any classes, except those special ones with individual people.

MEH: You said that you left the college for the summer of '48. Did Oli stay at the college for that summer?

JCS: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: And you went to Texas to visit family, or – ?

JCS: Yes. I was staying with my parents – with Kimry, the baby. That was the summer that – I wasn't there – Wait now. I was, I do, I was there when Merce and what's-his-name, the composer?

MEH: Cage.

JCS: Cage. For those wonderful first performances. Those were marvelous. They made the woods come alive.

MEH: Was that the Satie?

JCS: No. That was that next summer when I wasn't there. You know, this was just an early –

MEH: They visited in the spring.

JCS: [AFFIRMATIVE] Well, I suppose that's what it was. Cage gave a concert, which just made the sounds of the whole world come alive. That was a marvelous experience. But I wasn't there for that whole summer and the wonderful production they did, and such. I didn't know Fuller. Oli became good friends with him, but I didn't even meet him until much later. That was a wonderful meeting, though. I met him just once, and we visited them – I don't remember where it was, somewhere in New England, probably. They were living in their trailer, and we went in and visited for awhile. It was an amazing thing. He created a wonderful feeling. I had an incredible feeling of well-being after spending twenty minutes with him. It was very interesting. But other than that I never really, I never really knew him.

MEH: So at the end of the summer, Oli came to Texas to meet you, and then –

JCS: In our Model A Ford that we'd gotten up in New England and driven back to school, and then he drove it out and we came up here.

MEH: "Here" being – ?

JCS: Here being Taos. Came to New Mexico. Which we hadn't known anything about it except that Albers said the air was clear and bright and we didn't really have a plan for a location – so we thought we'd investigate it. Stayed for almost precisely a year.

MEH: Was Oli painting then? Were you working? He still had the GI Bill?

JCS: Well, yes. He did, and he was under the titular head of a painter here. He did start painting and I was weaving – belts actually – and doing color studies in

thread. I mean, we had a wonderful time. This was a marvelous place for people who enjoyed their visual selves, of course, as you can see. We enjoyed thoroughly studying the land and seasons and the changes. It was like a visual laboratory for us. Of course, it's a very easy way – then, especially – to travel to a foreign country, because it seemed like that. It was nicely separate. It was a good period for us to sort of digest things a little bit before the shock of going to the other world, the real world, after school. We spent five months up on the mountain at the Hawk Ranch, which is right next to the Lawrence Ranch, way up on the mountain. We visited Frida in her cabin up there. It was marvelous. That's where – At some point there, there was the little split, and a number of those people came to see us up there, on their way.

MEH: That was the Black Mountain split.

JCS: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: Ted and Bobbie stopped by, and Trude? You were a way station for the wounded.

JCS: Yes. Right. RIght. We had a wonderful cat at that point. His name was Pronounce – for obvious reasons. That's what he said. Whenever people would arrive, he would take off into the deep woods, and as long as there were visitors he would stay in the woods, and as soon as they drove out he would know it was a real exit and appear home again. It was a wonderful place. It was probably a nice place to stop at on leaving there and going on to the unknown and unresolved.

MEH: So what form did the unknown take – when you left?

JCS: Oh, no, I meant for them. It was a fine place to stop. Well really –

MEH: After a year – you were here for a year –

JCS: The last day we sold our wonderful car for two hundred dollars, which is what we had paid for it, and left and went to Mexico and lived in a suburb of Mexico City, with a view from Oli's studio up on the top of Popo on clear mornings. That was – I'm not sure exactly how long – four or five months, maybe. We met some lovely people there who sent us to visit a school in Washington, which is the Georgetown Day School. When we went back, we went to see the school and were invited to go up to New England and help run a children's camp for a summer, which we did. The camp was run by the director of the school, Agnes King Inglis O'Neill [PH], a very, very fine educator who, I guess, began the school, the Georgetown Day School. We went up and spent the summer at this camp with Kimry, who was then three, between three and four maybe, and spent the summer there. After that, Agnes invited both of us to come and teach at her school. She liked that I talked to children like they were adults. I don't know what that meant exactly, but anyway she – Oli taught the fifth grade and I the kindergarten, and that's how I got involved in the education thing. It was a wonderful school, very fine school. We were there for two years. Oh, then we went to New York. Is this – ?

MEH: I'd like to have sort of a chronology. [AFFIRMATIVE].

JCS: We went to New York and I taught at Miss Hewitt's Classes. It was a sort of a fancy girls' school, and I continued with my experimental work. The directress wanted me to go back to school and get a degree, because she said

"Education needs you." But I was involved with children. I wanted to have more children. So I taught for that year, and then for the next fifty tried to figure out what it was I had been doing, which was fun. Then we went out to the Cape in the summer and stayed in Paul Williams' triangle house in Wellfleet. Well, Oli was teaching at Hunter and at Cooper Union in the city, and then we wanted to be out of the city for awhile, so he worked at carpentry and commuted to do classes in New York at Hunter, I guess, at one of them. So we lived in Paul's house for a whole winter, and that was a marvelous year. We were just over the bay –

MEH: He was commuting back to New York to teach that whole time?

JCS: [AFFIRMATIVE] Well, at least for one semester. I'm not sure. But he'd go down for two or three days of teaching. I think I may have done a little weaving there. I'm not sure. But it wasn't anything important. Then in the spring we had to move out of the house because different people came and shared it. We re-built a barn right on the edge of the water. Made it into a wonderful two-story strange house. That summer Paul and Sally Goodman and their two children shared it with me, and Oli taught at the University of Vermont for the summer. Then after they left, another Black Mountain – Liz Resnik – Liz Gellhorn, Elizabeth Gellhorn, and David Resnik and their children came and shared it with me the second part of the summer. It was a wonderful building. The high tides came up in the basement. Oh, so nice. Is this relevant? Going on with my life story?

MEH: Yes, because I would like a sense of chronology in terms of what you did. Also, the connections with other Black Mountain people – how people were interconnecting after they left the college.

JCS: Right. Who was it? I can't remember their names. Liz and Dave were living in the city then, and their daughter – Kim? – Kim was the same age as my Kimry. We spent considerable time together. Oh, at the end of that – That's right. We hadn't decided what to do next and I was very eager to come back to New Mexico but Oli didn't really know what he wanted to do next. Paul said "Well, you know what you want to do, so why don't you just go to New Mexico?" so we did. We came back, with another ten-month-old child -- Denny. The second – Both times – How old was she? Anyway, about a year old. And lived at the Wurlitzer place. Do you know what that is? The Wurlitzer Foundation. It's a group of houses in the town there, in Taos, where people can get a grant to live for a year – some period of time or other. We lived there for most of the winter and then moved to a house up here overlooking Valdez. Oli was really painting. He was very much involved with the art activities in town, with the young – he started the Taos Moderns group. We knew Rena and she was living with Max Feinstein, at that point, and we were friends. I was just remembering last night, Rena taught me a very important thing: how to quickly make mashed potatoes. [LAUGHS] You peel them, cut them in small pieces and boil them, with a little salt. I was so impressed with this easy way to achieve that. We were here then through – we went back when, well, after Connor was born.

MEH: That would have been what year?

JCS: Well, Connor was born when I was forty. I was born in '25 – 1965. Oli had gone back, had a show in New York. Oh, while we were here we had met the Ericksens. Do you know who they are? Erik is a psychiatrist, Erik Erikson. He invented the identity crisis. [OVERTALK]

MEH: I know who he is.

JCS: And Joan. They were here, had just come. They stayed here for part of a summer. They had just been in Mexico and he was working on – I'm not sure now which one it was, but he had – getting a manuscript typed up here while they were here. Joan and Oli and I were good friends and she spent a lot of time with us. She was doing jewelry. This is all in my Three Weavers – it's sort of boring to go through it again.

MEH: I could probably pick up a lot of it there, but go ahead.

JCS: Yes. Anyway, when we went back east, Oli needed to be there, and some people who had collected both our work offered us their house in Remsenburg on Long Island to live in for the winter. Oli had his studio in New York, and so I and Jenny and Connor lived in a wonderful little old New England house in Remsenburg, and Oli came out weekends. Kimry had gone to – now I can't think of what it was. She went to art school – Minneapolis School of Art. Then in order to get out of it, she got a job doing lettering for cards. What is the big card company? I can't think of it. The big one that has all the little stores.

MEH: Hallmark?

JCS: Hallmark, yes. She learned calligraphy and she became a calligrapher for them, so that's where she was. We were on the Cape. While we were there, Joan asked – Joan Erikson – asked if I would come up to Stockbridge and teach weaving.

MEH: While you were out here in Taos you had been weaving?

JCS: Oh yes. Oh, well I had – I mean my weaving career just whizzed by. My tapestry weaving career is now ending. All those years we were in Taos, I was weaving tapestries, like these. Oli was painting mostly his ellipse paintings by then. I had sort of decided that I had done enough of that, because weaving the tapestries had been a way for me to explore, and I had sort of gone through what that was, what I was exploring then, and had sort of stopped weaving tapestries. Because I was just making pretty things to put up. Producing tapestries, not really accomplishing anything with it. So I had sort of given that up. So I did do that. I moved up to Stockbridge and Oli commuted from there, instead of to Long Island, and that was the time of – Oli was an extremely powerful person, and we had a great deal in common. It was never a mistake, but it wasn't easy. Being alone I had the experience – I mean living most of the time on Long Island, I had the experience of making up my own mind, not having to adjust to this powerful person. I think that's what happened, and so we gradually parted. Later, when David and I got together, we decided to – Well, we started writing a book about the whole Riggs program that Joan had invented. We got grants, and Joan got grants, and we

wrote this book called Activity, Recovery, Growth. Now what happened next. Then we decided to come out here.

MEH: You and David.

JCS: Well, David and Jenny and Connor and I came out here for just for a vacation. Then we went back, and eventually we moved out here.

MEH: Now at what point did you really stop weaving?

JCS: Well, actually, I stopped weaving when I moved east. I made a hanging loom, some kind of a hanging tapestry loom, and did a few things. Connor and I spent a lot of time wandering, roaming, and visiting woodsy places and such, and picking up turkey feathers. I wove those and did some work like that, but I had basically – I had lost interest in weaving tapestries. That isn't what I was doing anymore.

MEH: Right. So then you started your writing?

JCS: I started writing Three Weavers, before we moved back out there, and then that's what I was doing there. In between I was writing this book – sorry about that [REFERS TO DOG BARK?] – I was off and on working on the, on "The Bridge," the story of the teaching thing. Actually, I discovered when I was living – You know, I lived in Stockbridge – Well, we went there, moved there, when Connor was in kindergarten, and he was – He was there for sixteen or eighteen years, something like that. I mean, that was really the place where he grew up.

MEH: Did you live there until he finished high school? You stayed there until he was independent?

JCS: Yes. Yes. He went to the nursery school at Riggs – the Austin Riggs Center is the place where I went up to teach. [TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

MEH: I was going to ask you about a couple of other people at the college. We'll go back to Black Mountain? Was Ray Johnson there when you were there?

JCS: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: Do you have particular memories of Ray?

JCS: Very fond ones. He was a Finn, you know, which was fun. But he was just a delightful person, a good friend of Oli's and part of the artists group that they had. I just – it's interesting, I just remember him as a person and being there, an enthusiastic worker and such. But I had no incidents or stories of him, except once when we flew to New York from out here, I guess, we stayed with him in his apartment. I remember a wonderful tall narrow painting of his, with little ribbons, very narrow rows of color, but I think I probably have it somewhere. We took, I think, a picture of Kimry sitting in front of it. But I don't have any particular – I don't specifically remember his work, other than that, except I think he was probably a vivid part of the drawing sessions, but I don't remember much in detail.

MEH: Do you have particular memories of the government of the college? The student meetings or community meetings? Do you think the college really worked as a self-governing community effectively?

JCS: Well my quick answer would be "Definitely," but, of course, that's obviously only part of the picture. One interesting thing was when Niebyl and a student of his, a young student of his whose name I can't remember, were there and

they were very eager to have the college join the SNYC as a college. You must know about this story.

MEH: Go ahead.

JCS: There was a great to-do about it because certain people, I know certain faculty members were upset – Eddie Lowinsky, for one. Eddie was very, Eddie was one of the people who was very actively involved in trying to gain black students. He was very politically active and concerned. Oli was very non-politically active and totally involved in his painting and in that kind of thing, but he came out of it and worked – gave everything up and worked for I don't remember how long this was, but it became – it just involved in talking to people, trying to – we felt it was very important that, well, that you couldn't join an organization from a group which was these people now and other people later, for one thing. To make, convince the rightfully liberal people like José –

MEH: Yglesias?

JCS: – Yglesias and Liz Gellhorn – I remember she never was convinced that they could do anything but go totally with the SNYC. Anyway, Oli's attempt was to arrange it so that – I forget the actual way it was put, but so that the college as a whole didn't become a sponsor of it. So that was an interesting possibility within the kind of the selection of people who were there, that there could be this kind of a struggle. It was very important while it was going on. So that was one example of natural functioning, I think. I don’t know. You know, the life of the college was almost like a life, it occurs to me, that it was almost like a being, and it came from somewhere, it evolved out of certain things, and it was

different at different times. But it always had its own soul, basically, I think. It had a history. It couldn't become something else and still be itself. Fortunately, it never lost itself and so I think the problems it had were real problems that it was reasonable for it to have, probably. I had never thought of that before, but recording with you is very inspiring. [LAUGHTER]

MEH: I think of Black Mountain as opposed to more rigidly-organized institutions as really an organic form, in a sense, that grew and evolved, and it was a life. It was permitted that it could have a life.

JCS: It was considered possible that it could be what it seemed to be, or what people thought it could be. Enough people allowed that it – "It's possible.". Almost like that.

MEH: There were black students at the college when you were there. Do you have any particular memories of the integration of the college? Or was it just a part of being there?

JCS: Well, it was just part of being there. It was something that we felt – it was important to us that this could happen, and it was difficult. The only person I remember is the girl who was – I can't remember her name now – who was a singer.

MEH: Delores Fullman?

JCS: Right. I think so. Yes. I didn't really have much – I think she may have been the only black student while I was there. We did have black community members who were well loved and important in the community. They ran the whole food department in the kitchen and were very important to us. I think they probably

felt part of the community. I mean they were there all the time. They had to. They had a little boy who was there also. It was too bad that that was – That was too bad that we weren't able to have a flowering, really broad-skinned group of people, but that was the times. It just wasn't quite, quite time yet. I guess. I don't know how many people there were eventually, how many black students there were.

MEH: Never very many. I think at one point there may have been four or five.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]