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Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF TAPE 1]

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

AO: Well, I was at the Rhode Island School of Design in my second year and feeling disillusioned with my second year. The first year at RISD was very interesting and sort of playing around in various media. Then I went into the textile department the second year, and it was disappointing because there was still sort of a hangover from the, before the War, There were all these old fogies who had worked in mills for most of their life, and in semi-retirement they came to teach in the textile department. That's all changed now, or so I understand. But at that time I thought, 'Well, I'm not really interested in power loom weaving, for one thing." A friend of mine who had been in the first year with me had gone to the University of Chicago from RISD, after her first year, and she heard a lecture by Albert Levi. Of course, he was talking about Black Mountain College. She said, "I think you should check into this school." She said, "I don't know very much about it except what he spoke about." She thought I should find out. So I think she gave me the address. I don't know how I would have found out otherwise. But I wrote to the school and I got a response from Anni Albers, and

she said what her aims were as far as textiles go. I was so impressed to get a letter from her, with so much information about the school, I thought – without knowing anything more about it – that I would go there. So I went in January.

MEH: That was January '49?

AO: Yes, I guess it was.

MEH: Had you gone to RISD directly from high school?

AO: No, after I left high school, I went into the navy for two years. That was 1944-46. Then I applied to go to RISD, and they had a full quota. So I started working in a bank in Providence because various members of my family worked at the bank as well. Of course, I hated every moment of it. I was very anxious to get into RISD, and I was put on a waiting list. They told me – finally they told me – I guess it was the next term, they'd had, they had a space for me the next semester. So I started at RISD, and that was very, that first year was very exciting. So that's how I found out about Black Mountain College and that's how I went.

MEH: You were from Rhode Island?

AO: I was from Rhode Island.

MEH: Had you attended public schools?

AO: Yes.

MEH: What did your parents do?

AO: My father worked at Bird & Sons Roofing, and he was the head of the maintenance crew of the factory or whatever you would call it. They made roofing material. My mother lived at home until the Second World War, and she

got a job working in a mill as sort of her patriotic duty, I think. We lived in a little town in Rhode Island called Graniteville. I went back last year with my sister and brother-in-law to see the town and to see the place where we grew up, and it had changed so drastically. It wasn't a village any more. It was just a strip along the highway, in a sense. I thought, "Well I never want to come back to this place ever again." It was very depressing.

MEH: Do you remember – So when you went to Black Mountain, you really didn't know anything [INTERRUPTION], you really didn't know anything about their general educational ideals?

AO: No, I didn't –

MEH: Educational philosophy.

AO: Except what Anni had told me in her letter. No, I didn't know very much about it. I went pretty naively to Black Mountain College.

MEH: Do you remember physically how you traveled?

AO: Yes, I came on the train, all the way to – I guess the train used to stop in Black Mountain, did it? Yes. I went all the way. I guess I must have gone to New York to get the train. I can't think that I went to Boston. I must have – from New York to Black Mountain.

MEH: Had you been in the South before?

AO: No. Never. Virginia was the furthest south I'd ever been, and that was when I was in the navy.

MEH: Do you remember your first reaction to the college?

AO: Pretty much. What I remember is that there were some people playing baseball in the field just as you came in the entrance, and I thought, "Well, that's interesting!" It must have been, I got there before lunch, and, oh, Mrs. Bodky met me. I guess I was directed to her because she was more or less in charge of placing people in the dormitories. So, I met her as one of the first people, and she showed me to the place where I was going to sleep, which was the girls' dormitory on the second floor – which was all men. My roommates were Ted Dreier, Jr. and Bob Rauschenberg and I'll think of the other two people – Donald Droll -- there were five of us, I guess, in the dormitory. It remained pretty much the same over my time there – except that Rauschenberg left and then came back later. Then Ted Junior left shortly after his parents left the school. What is the name of – Well I can't think of the – but it will come to me.

MEH: What –

AO: I met Mary Fitton that day, Mary Fitton Fiore, who was one of the first people I met. It was on the steps of the dining room. Also Donald Alter was there, and also Victor Kalos. I got the feeling of a sort of intimate, intimacy, right away. Mary had just come out of the service too and that's how we both got started at the same time, I guess. Both Donald and Victor had come from the high school in New York that a lot of Black Mountain people came from, which was –

MEH: Music and Art?

AO: Music and Arts. [“Yeah” deleted. OATES NOTE: Too many Yeahs, Mary. And actually it’s a Black Mt. Yah, that we all sort of picked up from Albers, Jalowetz and Bodky.]

MEH: So that first semester, did you study weaving?

AO: Yes, I did. Yes. I was in Anni Albers' very small class. I think there were just, there were just three of us initially, and then Bob Rauschenberg and Susan Weil joined the class. Anni set a project up for us to begin with, which was to build our own loom, our own backstrap loom, which seemed like an endless amount of time – practically the whole first half-year. Somewhere, I still have the little piece of weaving that I did on that. So, I think it's all still set up as a backstrap loom. It's in the attic. I think I know where it is. I'll search it out.

MEH: The other attic?

AO: The other attic.

MEH: So, what do you think, looking back now, was the benefit or lack of benefit in doing that as a project, as a student?

AO: I thought it was a very good way to begin, but I thought that perhaps that could have come a little bit later on. I'd had so little experience with the hand loom at that point, although I had worked on a handloom at Rhode Island School of Design. I think it would have been better to go forward a little bit and then come back to a backstrap loom. The interesting thing about a backstrap loom is that you're completely unlimited as to what you can do. You can do almost anything on it, as far as weaving goes. You know, it was – for one thing – the sort of loom that Peruvians used to make those very intricate fabrics that they made. They were also limited to the width of a backstrap loom, which can't be very wide because you can't cope with it if you have it tied to a tree and to your back.

MEH: In addition to that, do you have particular memories of her class and how she conducted it? You said there were three students before –

AO: Yes, and I'm trying to think who the other people were. Sue and Bob became so much part of my life there that I can't remember the other people very clearly. They just kind of dragged me into their life.

MEH: What were they like then?

AO: Well, Bob was – Well they were both painting. Bob was doing these enormous paintings. He was doing a huge portrait of Delores –

MEH: Fullman.

AO: Delores Fullman. A life – It was actually larger-than-life-size. When he first started out on it, I thought it was absolutely beautiful. He started with the drawing. Then he went on to paint, and for the first few days it was very beautiful, and then it got uglier and uglier, and I think he pretty much destroyed it. I think he thought he did too, but he just couldn't stop. It was a monumental project. It was like – It was at least six feet high, by the width of the canvas, all stretched on a stretcher. We also had to – you know, I wasn't allowed to go to bed although it was like past midnight because he was still working, and so he had to have everybody around him. So Sue had to stay up and then Donald Droll.

MEH: Not Donald Alter.

AO: Not Donald Alter. He was involved with an art gallery in New York after he left Black Mountain.

MEH: I know who you're talking about. He died fairly young.

AO: Yes, he did. Yes. I was very surprised that he did.

MEH: Was he part of that group?

AO: He was part of the group. But he was a little more independent than I was. I was sort of dragged from place to place. We used to go to church in Asheville on Sundays, to the black church, Baptist church, and we were greeted like long-lost family in the church. It was a very stimulating experience.

MEH: How did that come about?

AO: I think it – I wonder who first started going there?

MEH: Did Delores go with you? Was that a –

AO: Delores went with us, yes.

MEH: So that might have been the –

AO: That was it. She would go every Sunday. I think she sang there. I'm not sure whether she did or not, but I think she did. Anyway, we would go. It was really very – it was a very, it was a great experience.

MEH: Who is "we"?

AO: Bob, Sue, and myself, and Delores. Then there was a Rima Stewart. No, that's not – It was Rima Something-Or-Other [Axelrod]. She came. At one point we were sitting in the balcony, and I thought she was going to jump over the balcony she was so excited. . But just, just a car full of people, actually, not – it wasn't a big mob scene from Black Mountain College.

MEH: And you were received like long lost family, you said?

AO: Yes. Yes. Oh, they really greeted us very, I mean, with open arms. It was really – That in itself was moving, I think.

MEH: Did you take part in other activities at the church?

AO: Well, I joined the chorus, and so did Bob Rauschenberg at BMC. We were the only – no there was another person who – We had three tenors, and we used to have to have special rehearsals because we were so terrible. Bob sang like he does everything else – ab-, with wild enthusiasm and totally off-key, and, of course, none of us read music either. I mean I had no experience with choruses before, or music in that sense. That same person – Donald Droll -- who was in the gallery in New York was the third tenor, and occasionally we were so bad that Delores would turn around and sing tenor with us to keep us on key. But we were wonderful, and we were doing a Bach choral thing. I can't remember what it was, something from the B Minor Mass, I think, and we were invited to come and sing at a black church in – near Asheville, but it wasn't the church that we had been going to on Sundays.

MEH: This is the Black Mountain chorus you're talking about.

AO: This is the Black Mountain chorus. So they invited us to come and sing there, with this very off-key piano accompaniment. But that was a stimulating experience, too, because they were so enthusiastic about our singing. But we had to have many special rehearsals for the tenors.

MEH: Who was directing the chorus at Black Mountain then?

AO: I knew you were going to ask me that.

MEH: The woman, or –

AO: Yes, it was a woman, a wonderful –

MEH: Bimbus. Charlotte Schlesinger.

AO: Charlotte Schlesinger, yes. She was an absolutely marvelous woman. At one point I asked Mrs. Jalowetz how we sounded, and she said, "You sound like a hundred people!" She didn't say that we sounded well, but --

MEH: So, let's go back – Well, first, let's stay where we are. You say Bimbus was wonderful. What was she like? Describe her as a person in her behavior. Why was she wonderful?

AO: Well, she was full of enthusiasm, like a new teacher, I would say. You know, it didn't really – If we were – if someone was interested in singing, like Bob. He was really terrible, and he would throw the rest of the tenors off. In fact, he probably threw most of the chorus off. But his enthusiasm was what stirred her and so she worked with him. It was marvelous to see her play the piano, because she was terribly nearsighted, for one thing. She was down on the keyboard with her whole body, and she would sometimes play something during a performance of the chorus at school. It was wonderful to hear her play. She played on a piano that <u>was</u> in tune at the school. An interesting thing that happened to me the first day that I was at Black Mountain, Mrs. Bodky took me up to the Studies Building and introduced me to Trude Guermonprez, who was also in the weaving department at that point. I thought that I got a very unusual reaction from her when she opened her door of her study in the Studies Building. She looked at me with surprise and a very strange look. I thought, "Oh, she doesn't like me – right off the bat." It was only like a year later, or months later anyway, when we were on a friendly basis that she told me that I looked so much like her husband, who had disappeared during the War, that

she thought for a moment that he had come back – because she never knew what had happened to him. He was in the Resistance.

MEH: Let's go back now. You were talking about Trude. After you finished your backstrap loom, how did Anni Albers conduct her class? What sorts of things did you do?

AO: She talked quite a bit about her experience collecting the fabrics from – that became the Engelhardt Collection. She often would bring pieces out to look at and to sort of analyze. I think she wanted to impress on us how complex and very beautiful they were. It was my first experience with Peruvian fabrics. I'd never seen any before, old Peruvian fabrics. She talked about her philosophy as far as fibers went and the quality of different fibers. We would sit around a table. We weren't near a loom, not to speak of anyway. There were – there were some projects going on on various looms that – One of them was – Trude had gotten a commission from these people who lived in Asheville in a Marcel Breuer house? She was working on this fabric on an eight-harness counter balance loom. Oh, what are they called? It's a kind of loom which is a dreadful kind of loom to work on. She only got partly finished on that fabric before she left the school, and she turned over the project to me. It was a nightmare, because everything went wrong with that – the loom and the fabric. Finally, I finished it and the client was very happy with it, but I was very grateful to get off that awful loom. So, that was there for us to see. I don't know whether Anni had anything going on one of the looms or not. But we were involved in making a backstrap loom, and we had to go to Molly Gregory's to get some wood. We

kept polishing the wood for a long time and then setting up the warp. I don't think Anni gave us very much information about how to make a warp. I think we had to figure it out. I think, I think Bob got a little tired of the whole thing. But we continued. I mean, he was in the class for the first few months.

MEH: Did you take a class with Trude?

AO: I'm trying to think whether I did or not. She was around, but I don't think that I actually worked with her. Then after Anni left, was it Barbara Siegel?

MEH: Ellen.

AO: Ellen Siegel came, and I wasn't too enthusiastic about her. I was let down, I guess, by the Albers leaving school. I did quite a bit of work for Albers himself, redoing some student color studies in more permanent material, because we worked with construction paper on color projects, and they deteriorate so quickly. He had some lovely coated papers and so I reproduced a lot of the students' work. I must have done – I did quite a bit of work for his book, just reproducing older color studies with these good papers. That became a – Before the Albers left, that became quite a major project for me and very interesting.

MEH: Did you take his class?

AO: I took his color class. I'm sorry I didn't take a drawing class at the same time, but I didn't.

MEH: What was he like as a teacher?

AO: Well, I think he was probably the best teacher I ever had in my life. He was very – He's a, well, one would say he was very Prussian, but he wasn't. He said he

was from Westphalia and he was worse than the Prussians. He was very strict, as far as – You couldn't attend his class unless you had done the previous assignment – color assignment – outside of the classroom, and he was very serious about that. If you didn't have something to put up in front of the, you know, on the board, you couldn't stay in the classroom. He made sure everybody who was there had actually put something up. I can remember one girl coming to the class late. He was very angry with her and said "You have to be on time when you come to my class." She said, "I've just come from the dentist," and he said "I don't care!" But then he would talk about the work and point out things that could have been done that weren't done, and very flattering about a good color study. He also would philosophize about painters and art in general, talk about the – I remember him talking about Greek sculpture and how it had become more and more beautiful over the years because it returned more and more to its original form as stone. Of course, he was right about that. They were, you know, they were colored originally, probably not very attractively. He loved Cézanne, which is kind of a surprise, I think, and he talked about Cézanne as a colorist.

MEH: Was Bob Rauschenberg still in his class at that point, or had they –

AO: He was. I remember we did some kind of a construction class together too, and the Bodkys had this big Airedale dog and Bob, for some reason, thought the construction of the Airedale would be interesting. I can't remember exactly what it looked like, except it was very hairy, sort of blondish hairy reddish colors, which were I think made with leaves rather than hair. He presented this to

Albers in the class and Albers absolutely went berserk about it, and said "How ugly!" and "How could anybody do such a stupid thing!" I remember Bob was in tears.

MEH: This was a lifesize copy? Model?

AO: It was – No, it was about maybe, about this size, I guess, you know. Something like that.

MEH: Rauschenberg recalls he feels Albers was just brutal toward him.

AO: Yes. But he also said that Albers was one of his best teachers.

MEH: Why do you think Albers reacted that way? I mean was this just so –

AO: I think part of it was the performance. I think he was always trying to keep students on their toes. I mean, he would react like you were trying to insult him, but I think part of it was drama and keeping the class alert and working hard. I wouldn't have dared not do a project, you know, for the next class. I can remember for several classes he was very flattering about my color studies. Then he asked us to bring in all of our work from the last few classes, as a collection. Then he looked at mine and he said "This man is cheating. He's doing the same design over and over again," and pointed out this – I had this kind of ladder construction with colors. It was very interesting – It was easy to change the same color and make it look different by using this construction. I just came on it as something that interested me and I <u>did</u> do it several times, you know, with different colors and so on. But I did it a little too much.

MEH: What classes did you – Who were other people in Albers' classes at the time? Do you remember? In his color class?

AO: I think Mary Fitton was in his class. Who else was –

MEH: Was Ruth Asawa still there?

AO: Ruth Asawa was still there, and I think she probably was in the class at that point. The wife of one of the Rice boys – was it Barbara Rice? Does that ring a bell?

MEH: Yes, let's see – It could have been June Rice. Dan was married to June and Jack was married to Barbara.

AO: Yes. Yes. It was Barbara who was in the class, and I think that maybe Jack was in the class, too. I'm not sure. I'm not sure. That was a long time ago.

MEH: What classes – That first semester while – before the big break-up, you were taking weaving, you were taking color with Albers, you were singing in the chorus. Were you taking other classes that you recall?

AO: Not that I recall. Oh, I was taking German class with Mrs. Bodky. I gave that up when – after several classes, because I was standing on the balcony of the dormitory, and I saw Mrs. Bodky walking by. I said "Guten Morgen, Frau Bodky," and she said "What?" I said "Guten Morgen." She said "What are you saying? I don't understand what you're saying." I said "Good morning," and I thought "Well, if I can't say 'Guten Morgen' properly I'm never going to be a German scholar." But I didn't give, I didn't give it up right away, but I was very disillusioned.

MEH: Did you get at all involved in the fracas that ended up in so many people leaving that year?

AO: No, I didn't even know it was going on, really. I knew that there was something in the works, but I didn't understand exactly what the problems were. Oh, I also took Bodky's music appreciation class, which he did in their house, and I became quite friendly with the Bodkys. It was a long time before I realized that the Bodkys and the Albers were not particularly on speaking terms. Of course, the Bodkys stayed on at the school after the Albers left, and the Dreiers.

MEH: So, you were really primarily studying that fall with refugees.

AO: Yes. Max Dehn. His ethics class – not mathematics – which I thought was very interesting. I loved Max Dehn. I thought he was a wonderful man.

MEH: We'll come to Max Dehn later, because I – You were there that semester. That summer, did you stay through the summer? That's the summer that Buckminster Fuller was there.

AO: Yes, I did.. I stayed for three years without a break. I mean I took, I was in the summer courses as well as the regular year for those three years.

MEH: Do you remember anything particularly about that summer? He came down with a bunch of students from ID.

AO: Yes. Well that was a very – I went to his lectures, which were fascinating and went on for hours on end. His students were kind of a separate group and they stayed pretty much to themselves most of the time. There were a few – A few of them would sort of wander on to the other groups, but most of them stayed very much together, and he had them working too, you know. They built the first geodesic dome there, which – the first one was a total disaster, because it collapsed. It was made out of aluminum tubing.

MEH: Venetian blind strips.

AO: Venetian blind strips. That was the first one.

MEH: [OVERTALK] That was the previous summer, '48.

AO: That was right. Yes, yes. So then the second summer they did a successful version of the geodesic dome. We had – what was the dietician's name? She wanted to take a photograph. She said "Stick your heads out of the top, Mr. Fuller." He popped his head out of the top of the geodesic dome and she took a photograph of it. She was Dutch.

MEH: Piet.

AO: Yes, Piet Swierstra. She said "I'm not Dutch. I'm Frisian."

MEH: So that next year, after Anni Albers left, Ellen Siegel came to teach weaving. Did you continue – Did you study with her?

AO: I sort of wandered away from her course, because I got very interested in photography that year.

MEH: My next question was going to be when did you become interested in photography.

AO: It was actually before she came, I guess. There was a little period when there wasn't very much going on in the weaving room and I finished my project. At that point I somehow got interested in photography – in a serious way. Looking back on it, I have always been interested in photography, and I can remember as a twelve-year-old, the first time I went to New York, I took a whole roll of film about skyscrapers. So, anyway, I started working with Hazel at that point. So

did Bob. I don't think Sue – no, she wasn't in Hazel's class. Donald Alter was, and I can't remember whether there was anyone else or not.

MEH: That first year – Okay, the summer of '49, you stayed. At the end of spring semester Bob and Sue left, and then came back a couple of years later.

AO: Yes.

MEH: That first year when Hazel was teaching, I think there were two projects that they did. You did the viewbook.

AO: Yes. right.

MEH: What do you remember about – Did the class do this? Do you remember anything about its organization or production?

AO: Yes, we did it together. Each one of the photographers who were involved in it did their own project within that format of the viewbook. So Donald was in it. Did Bob participate in that book? I don't think so.

MEH: He would have been gone then.

AO: Yes. But there were – There was Hazel and me and Donald. Who else was in that book? I can't remember.

MEH: Would Nick have been working then on photography?

AO: Yes, I guess he was. Yes. Yes.

MEH: The other project that year was the photography magazine. I think it was that year, not the next year. It was only produced in one edition and it had pasted in photos by maybe seven or eight – I can't remember if you're in that or not, but I would imagine you are.

AO: I think I might, might have been. It sounds familiar. Yes, I think I probably was.

MEH: How did Hazel, what was Hazel like as a teacher? How did she conduct her class, or her studies?

AO: Well, our darkroom was in her bathroom, for one thing, so it was rather an intimate group.

MEH: The darkroom had burned at that point. So that was in that little house by the Dining Hall.

AO: Well, she started on the – she started on the first floor of the Men's Dormitory. She had a little two – She had two rooms and a bathroom to herself, and then she moved to that little cottage. Hazel was a very silent teacher. It was like she wanted us to – like Anni's class – to find out for ourselves what it was all about to be a photographer, and she just encouraged everybody to do very much what they were particularly interested in. I got to be very close to Hazel, and her philosophy, whatever it was, of photography. I know that I absolutely loved old photographs, like the early photographers. I tried to kind of reproduce the quality that was in those wonderful black and white prints by doing long exposures. Then I took a whole bunch of photographs of people in a dark hallway, with hardly any light at all, so that the exposure would be like a minute or thereabouts. One of those photographs is in the attic up –

MEH: I think you found those photographs and didn't tell me!

AO: No, no I didn't. But I took one of Joan Stack. I remember finding a place that was dark enough so that I could do a long exposure of her, and that was a fairly successful photograph, I think – although I don't think she liked it very much.

MEH: And you graduated in photography?

AO: Yes.

MEH: What did that involve?

AO: Well, I set up a project for myself for my graduation project, and part of my project was to teach a class in weaving. That was during the summer session, one of the summer sessions. Also to have an exhibition of my photographs, so I spent a lot of time doing photographs and reprinting old photographs. I remember, like the week that I was supposed to have the exhibition up in that little gallery area in front of the Studies Building, I think I figured that there would be maybe between 25 and 30 photographs, and I spent hours in the darkroom. I can remember one day working all day and all night long. I just didn't – I came out of the darkroom to go to the dining room to have something to eat, and when I came back, all of my rejected photographs which were in a wastebasket, were gone, and I thought Hazel had taken them out and thrown them away or something. I never knew what happened to them. Years later I was at a party after a Merce Cunningham recital in New York, and Bob said, "You remember the night that you were in the darkroom printing, and you had gone out and I spotted all of these rejected photographs." He said, "I took them all." In his early collages, I kept looking to see if there were any of my photographs in them. I never actually found any that he might have used, and probably all of those things got thrown away again.

MEH: Sort of like twice-fried rice – twice thrown-away photographs!

AO: Right, exactly.

MEH: So, for your graduation you prepared really a portfolio of photographs.

AO: Yes. So then there was the thing about finding someone to be my graduating examiner, and you know all about that part of the graduation project.

MEH: Go ahead and tell me.

AO: Well, the idea was because we were not an accredited college, because the library wasn't big enough to be accredited in the State of North Carolina, if a person was interested in graduating, then it was necessary to find someone prominent in your field to say that you were qualified to graduate. That was part of the whole graduation thing. I had taken some of Hazel's photographs – I had asked her if I could take them to the Director of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, who was Edward Steichen. I made an appointment to see him when I was in New York and he said, "Yes, come and see me." I went, and he was very impressed with Hazel's photographs, and so I told him a little bit about her and that she had infantile paralysis when she was a child. He said, "Oh, that is a coincidence!" He said, "Because I'm in charge of commissioning a group of photographers to do photographs for a poster for the polio foundation." He thought it was interesting that Hazel was a photographer and she had had polio. So, he said, "The commission is five hundred dollars," which was a lot of money in those days, so I was all excited about that – for Hazel. So, I went back to Black Mountain to tell her all about this, and so then she started working on this project. But he said at the time, he said "Next time you come to see me" – like I was going to see him on a regular basis – he said, "Bring your own work with you." So I thought, when I decided that I was going to graduate, that I would ask him if he would be my graduating examiner, which would have

meant that he had to come to Black Mountain. So, I showed him my photographs, a little collection of photographs that I put together the next time I went to New York, and he said, "Yes, I will. I'll do that." He said, "It's very easy for me, because my brother-in-law is Carl Sandburg, and he lives in the next town." I said, "Great!" So, he was my examiner, and that's how that all started.

MEH: So – it's amazing, the audacity at that point. These were great men already.

AO: I know. Yes. I mean I was terribly impressed. Then when he came to the school, he was – We had to go – Pete and Betty Jennerjahn drove me to Carl Sandburg's farm to pick up Mr. Steichen, and, I mean, I was absolutely sweating at that point with fear and anxiety, and sort of out of it, really. . In a slight daze. We arrived and Carl Sandburg was standing on the porch eating scrambled eggs out of a frying pan, a black frying pan, and this big voice, "Oh, welcome!" He had just won a Pulitzer Prize, and he wanted a ride to Asheville to pick up his telegrams, his congratulatory telegrams. So, we drove to Asheville and left him off. I don't know – he must have had some arrangement for someone to pick him up – and then we continued on with Mr. Steichen to Black Mountain. That was like before lunch. He was there until something like five, between five and six o'clock in the evening, and it was a really tough day for me, because at the end, in the sort of around three o'clock in the afternoon, the whole faculty gathered to question me.

MEH: With him there.

AO: With him there. That was the hardest part for me.

MEH: Were these questions about your photography, or about your general knowledge?

AO: About my general knowledge. I had taken some kind of an examination which – I totally flunked out on mathematics. I mean – I think it was – I guess it was M.C. who said, "Well, you certainly have not done very well in mathematics, and so generally speaking you're not a well-educated person." At that point, Steichen decided that I had had enough of these questions, and he started to talk. At the end – I mean and he had quite a lot to say – everybody stopped to listen to him, and at the point that he finished what he was going to say he just stood up and he said, "Well, I guess that's it, and as far as I'm concerned this man is certainly qualified to graduate as a photographer." Then when we went out he said, "I guess that showed them." He said, "I find schools disgusting, and I think nobody should go to school!"

MEH: So, going back, there are a lot of people still to talk about, and you've been talking almost an hour so if you want a break at some point, just say “I'd like a break.” We have a lot more to talk about. Maybe we'll finish this tape which has about seven or eight more minutes on it, and then we'll –

AO: Oh sure.

MEH: What about – Thinking of different people, you had mentioned Max Dehn.

AO: Yes.

MEH: Did you take – You took his ethics course, you said. Not mathematics.

AO: Yes, I did. Not mathematics.

MEH: What was he like? How do you remember him?

AO: I thought that he was such a wonderful European. Both of the Dehns, actually, but so much him. As a very elderly man, I don't know exactly how old he was. He must have been in his late seventies, I guess, which doesn't seem very old to me now, but it did at that time. But his enthusiasm about life – and his stories were so interesting. He talked about how they left Germany and escaping by way of Russia to the Pacific, because it was the only way, at that time, that they could get out of Germany. So, they just – He said that, "We stood up quite a lot of the time." Somehow they finally got to the West Coast of the U.S. I can remember him telling a story in the ethics class – I don't know what the point of it was, but it was a very funny story – about his sister going past a modern building in Germany and saying, "Well, that stupid modern building must have been very dark inside to have to have all of those windows to light it up." I don't know what the point of it was, but I thought it was a very funny story. I've remembered it all these years.

MEH: It was a strange sense of logic. To appeal to him.

AO: Yes. I remember the exam that I took to go into the graduating division of Black Mountain College. He had a question, and the question was "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I mean, that was what he had intended to say, but he said something like, "Do unto others as you would have would do unto you," and I thought "This must be a trick question." I pondered over that question all morning long. Nick, Nicholas Cernovich, was trying for the Senior Division also. I said "That question, what does he mean by changing those words?" He said, "Oh that's just a typographical error." He said, "He didn't

mean that. He meant the original." Oh, it was such a revelation to me that I knew – that I had some answer for this. But I was totally stumped by the wording in the morning.

MEH: Did you ever go on hikes with him through the woods?

AO: Yes, yes, that was also wonderful, because he knew so much about the local flora.

MEH: How did he conduct his ethics class?

AO: Well, it was very informal, and he liked people to ask questions. I think he sat at the head of the class somehow. He sat down, rather than stood. He had, he had various themes, I mean – I can't remember how many classes there were, but quite a few, and each one had a theme. It's actually based on orthodox Jewish philosophy, I think, as little as I know about that. But I think that that was the foundation of the course. He would talk about various Jewish traditions that he thought were very silly, as well as things that he felt had their reasons. I think that was how he – I think that's how his sister's comment about the modern building having so many rooms [*sic*] because it was so dark inside .

MEH: What about – Did you take any of M.C.'s classes?

AO: No, I didn't. No. Not directly. But I remember her reading poetry, and talking about writing. I guess they were lectures. It must have been lectures because I didn't take her writing course. She wrote a poem for my graduation present, and I lost it through the years and I could only vaguely remember what it was about. Later, I asked her what that poem was and she said "I can't remember." So it's lost somewhere in time. She always moved me very much when she

recited poetry. I think – Oh yes, I remember, she read once poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and she read beautifully. But then she must have done some lecturing, because it wasn't all poetry. She was quite a fiery person. You know, that wonderful thing at Black Mountain. You could sit in the dining room anywhere you wanted to. You could sit with teachers or students or you could sit out on the porch. You could sit in the dining room itself, so there was that freedom of communication between students and teachers. Some teachers always had a lot of people around them.

MEH: M.C. would have been one of those people.

AO: Yes. Always.

MEH: And Olson would have been another.

AO: Olson, I can remember breakfasts with Olson.

MEH: He came to breakfast?

AO: Oh, yes, he came to breakfast every morning, and it would go on until noon practically. But I was always a little skeptical about Olson and his poetry readings, and I was totally confused about what he was driving at in his lectures and in his poetry. But I loved sitting at breakfast with him and just talking about things. He was very interesting then.

MEH: What was he like, generally?

AO: Well, he was a big man in every way. I mean he was tremendously tall, way over six feet, and big this way, and big voice, and bushy black eyebrows, and his little wife, Connie. I mean such a contrast between the two of them. I can remember Hazel having – She had a cocktail party once, and she invited Fuller

and his wife and Olson and Connie and me and I don't know who else was there. But we were all sitting around and Bucky didn't drink. He was a teetotaler, at that point. Apparently, he had drunk quite too much earlier on. Olson said something about him drinking fruit juice, and he said, "I'll bet, though, that he's the only man in this room who would be able to make the sound of a train whistle without any inhibitions." At that point Bucky Fuller made out this wild whoop like a train whistle. Olson said, "See. I was right!" Olson was a very charming man.

[END OF RECORDING ON TAPE 1. BEGINNING OF TAPE 2]

MEH: We were talking – We have a lot still to talk about. Let's just talk about some other teachers that you might remember. Do you have any particular memories of Natasha Goldowski or her mother, Madame?

AO: Yes. Well, I was quite friendly with both of them but in an abstract sort of way. My contact was usually in the dining room at mealtimes. I can remember Natasha was interviewed on a local radio station in Asheville, and she talked about her specialty, which was corrosion. She was talking about corrosion, and she said, "Well, naturally then, I was interested in the United States." Madame Goldowski understood English perfectly well, but she refused to speak English. She spoke French. I think she taught a French class, didn't she, at some point? Yes., I don't think she taught Russian.

MEH: I think Natasha did.

AO: Natasha taught Russian? Oh, that's quite possible. Madame Goldowski used to talk about – Or Natasha would tell about her mother escaping from Russia

with all of her jewels hidden in a ball of yarn that she was knitting on the way out, and how they used to go to the country and they would hire a car train – one of the, one of the cars on a train and the servants would come down and cover all of the upholstery pieces with white sheets. They brought their own cow with them when they traveled. I guess the cow went into the same car that they did – I assume – or maybe in the baggage compartment. I really don't know. So Madame kind of liked me, I think. I remember when I first got there she said that she had a nest of mice in her oven, and she was waiting for the mother to produce the children before she evicted them and turned the oven on.

MEH: Did you take classes with either of them?

AO: No, I didn't. No.

MEH: What was Natasha like in the community? What was sort of her role, beyond teaching?

AO: Well, she was very volatile and she was also very outspoken. I mean, if there was something that she didn't approve of, she would always say what her feelings were – whether they hurt somebody or not. There were times when people used to get up occasionally and say something, in the dining room, about announcing the beginning of a new class or something of the sort. When I was student moderator, and I can't remember what it was called, there was a thing at Black Mountain where the moderator could call a halt to all of the classes for a week, and it was a period when people were supposed to work specifically on a project of their own. I stood up to announce that we were going

to have a secession of classes for such-and-such a time. Natasha got up right after I sat down, and she said, "Well, I don't care what he says." She said, "My classes are continuing, and you'd better show up." Then Flola Shepard got up and said that she was going to have her regular classes – French classes – at seven o'clock in the morning.

MEH: So what did – What was your reaction? Did this make you feel like a powerless role or – ?

AO: No, I thought – because most of the people thought it was a good idea.

MEH: To have –

AO: To have this stop thing.

MEH: Yes. So they kept their classes going but most people stopped?

AO: They did, yes. I think probably people attended those classes that they were giving. Flola always had a small class because she thought if people were sincerely interested in learning French that they would get up in the morning in time to get to class at seven o'clock. So – it was a good idea.

MEH: I do hear from her students that they showed up.

AO: Yes.

MEH: That was one way to be sure you have only dedicated students.

AO: That, that was her point, I'm sure. Yes.

MEH: Eliminate the fluff!

AO: Yes. Right.

MEH: What was your role? What were your activities as student moderator?

AO: Well, if there was a – students would call a meeting – then I was the moderator of the meeting, but I also, as a student moderator, I became a member of the faculty and also a member of the Board of Trustees, and I sat in on faculty meetings and trustee meetings, as well as being student moderator. That was it, really.

MEH: Did you think that this really – What do you think was the importance of this? Do you think it worked? Do you think it was good? What effect did it have?

AO: I think it did. I think it worked. As moderator, I could – After a student meeting I could relate to the faculty what students were feeling about certain things. I think it was a very good idea. It gave the students more power, for one thing.

MEH: What do you think was the difference between – for example, if the college had let you come in sort of as a guest to the faculty – you know, the student moderator not as a member of the board or the faculty but simply a student representative who could come in to discuss things if they wanted to – what do you think was the difference between that and being actually a member of the faculty for purposes – and the board, a voting member of the board?

AO: Yes, yes. Well, it gave the student body more power through me. I guess that's the difference. If I was just sitting in on a meeting, it isn't the same as having an actual vote on a specific decision. I don't know whether you want this to go on the tape, but you can edit it out, I'm sure. There was a big brou-ha-ha about Joe Fiore living with Mary in the Studies Building, in the apartment in the Studies Building. Nell Rice was one of the outspoken persons about – t this should not be allowed, a teacher living with a student on the property, and it

perhaps may be related to her own background at Black Mountain. But, you know, I got disturbed about it because they had – Mary was a real adult. I mean she had been in the service and, like me, she was older than most of the other students. It wasn't a question of a teenaged student living with an older faculty member. It was something that she made a decision to do with, you know, in a very direct way and that was –

MEH: As an adult.

AO: As an adult. It seemed to me that that was up to them, what they did, and I said so at a meeting, and I got really very hot under the collar at some point because I thought Nell was being very silly about the whole thing. She kept saying, “What are people in Asheville going to say? What am I going to tell my friends in Asheville?" I thought, “Well, what in the world would they know about it in the first place, unless you told them." So, anyway, I had a specific voice in that, and the whole thing just fizzled out. Everyone just pretended that that meeting never happened, in a way.

MEH: What about – Let's talk about some other faculty. You took classes other than art and weaving and German briefly. Did you take any science classes? Do you recall?

AO: No, I didn't. No.

MEH: Any history? Literature?

AO: No, I didn't. No.

MEH: Did you take any anthro – did you take Paul Leser's classes?

AO: No, I didn't.

MEH: You were saying he was quite a character. [OVERTALK] How was that?

AO: Yes, well I only knew him as a friend, and again, just meeting him in the dining room. He always seemed to want to sit – it seemed like we always sat more or less at the same table at dinner, and he was very precise and German in his ways. One thing that I thought was very interesting, like one time he spilled a glass of milk on the table and he turned to me and said, "You stupid idiot. Why did you do that? I can't bear it when other people do things like that." He didn't like to be – he never liked to be accused of something which he actually should have been accused of. He would always deny that he'd done something. I thought it was very interesting – probably something from his childhood.

MEH: What about – ? Were you student moderator – what was the other conflict? Oh, when there was the conflict between Ray Trayer and Bill Levi?

AO: Yes.

MEH: Do you have any memories of that?

AO: I know that there was a conflict there, and I just find it hard to figure out exactly what the conflict was except that I think that Ray just didn't like Albert Levi.

MEH: What was Bill Levi like?

AO: He was very pedantic, and I only really – My only contact with him was in faculty meetings. I didn't take any of his classes. Occasionally we might have sat together in the dining room. M.C. was a friend, but I never thought of Levi as a friend, exactly. I think it was he who was rather, slightly remote, more formal, certainly more formal than M.C. I can remember I helped do costumes for Marriage on the Eiffel Tower, and he was in it. I thought it would be

interesting if he had a very white face. He had on tights, I think, with a shirt over his tights. Can't remember exactly what the costume was like, but his feet and his hands and his face showed, and I thought that they should be covered with clown white so he was very white and black. We couldn't find any clown white makeup, so I used Chem-Tone paint . It was okay the night of the performance, but afterwards, I mean, he was beet red from the irritation from this paint, as you can imagine. He complained about it very much.

MEH: "As you can imagine."

AO: Yes. Can't blame him for that. But it did look good.

MEH: Well, the photographs – Now I'll take another look at the photographs. So let's – I want to talk about summer sessions, and I want to talk about some of the drama performances, but are there other regular faculty members that you remember in particular? Did you take any classes with Dave Corkran?

AO: No. No. There again, you know, I had contact with him, but just on a social basis. I didn't take any of his classes.

MEH: Did you do any bookbinding with Johanna?

AO: Well, I did for my graduation project. These three portfolios that I have, which by the way must, might, be in Key West and not in the attic, because I remember the last time I was here I pulled them out. If they were in the attic, they would be on top of everything rather than buried underneath. So, it's quite possible that I took them down to Key West and I can't remember. I have lots of photographs down there. But anyway, I made the portfolios with Mrs. Jalowetz's help. I also did – I painted the endpapers for the portfolios and they were

covered with a really nice linen fabric which I wish I could say that I wove, but I didn't. But she was very helpful. She liked the idea very much of doing that. She worked with me and showed me how to glue the fabric to cardboard and everything.

MEH: Did you take Joe Fiore's classes?

AO: No.

MEH: What about Pete Jennerjahn?

AO: Pete's? Yes, I did. After Albers left, he did color class and drawing sessions and so on, and I took his color class, too.

MEH: At that point, after the big break-up in '49, you had a lot of really young teachers. You had students replacing – basically, you had Hazel, you had Joe Fiore, you had Pete Jennerjahn, you had Betty teaching dance. Did you do any dance?

AO: No, but I did a performance.

MEH: What was that?

AO: Well, it was during a dance recital, and I don't know what I had been – Oh, I know. It was late one night and I was in the dining room listening to the Scarlatti record on the phonograph, and I started dancing, thinking I was totally by myself. M.C. and someone else were peeking in from the kitchen. When I was finished, they started applauding, which was very embarrassing. So, then I told – I guess I told Betty at breakfast or something that this had happened, and she said, "Well," she said, blinking her eyes the way she did, batting her eyelashes, she said "I'd like to see what you were doing." I said "Well, I thought about

doing the Scarlatti thing just sitting in a chair and just dancing with my hands." She said "Well let me see it." So, in Hazel's living room I did it one afternoon, and she said, "Would you do it for the recital?" I said, "Well, yes, I suppose I would." She said, "I don't know why I've been dancing all these years and studying," she said, "when you can sit down and do that!" So, I did the performance along with a lot of other people doing things. We had a group of people from Asheville come to the recital, and this man came up to me after the performance, and he said "Well, I didn't know what you were doing," he said, "but I was with you all the way."

MEH: It seems to be that one thing that worked at Black Mountain, in a less structured community, is this ability sort of to feed off of things that happened that weren't necessarily programmed or approved by a committee or whatever.

AO: Yes. Yes. Yes. I think that's true.

MEH: I think which on a student level is very good.

AO: And there was always a lot of activity that everyone got involved in, whether they really wanted to or not. For example, there was a dance class right before lunchtime, in the dining room, which meant that all the tables had to be moved out of the way so that the dancers could use the floor. So people would start coming in for lunch and they would be witnessing the end of the dance class. That was very nice. Then everybody would get involved in moving the tables back and the chairs and everything. Or somebody would be practicing on the piano, which was also in the dining room. There were those very free things that went on a lot, in various ways.

MEH: Do you have any particular memories of Katy Litz?

AO: Yes, I do. I liked Katy very much, and I loved her dancing, and I took some photographs of her. Do you know the one of her standing on the porch at the dining hall, in profile, and she's in the costume that she used in Fire in the Snow.

MEH: That white dress.

AO: Which I thought was such a beautiful dance. So, I asked her if I could take some photographs of her in that costume, and we did them on the porch, and I did like four or five photographs. I don't have any of the negatives. I only have prints of those. There's one in an issue of Dance magazine, which is one of the my favorite photographs, and that's the only copy that I have is a reproduction in the magazine.

MEH: What was Katy like as a person?

AO: Very – She was a very calm sort of person. When I was going to leave Black Mountain – after I had graduated and I was going somewhere and not thinking exactly where I was going to go, she invited me to come and live with them in Brooklyn, she and her husband. At that point, Vera and Paul were moving to Boston, and they said that I was welcome to come and live with them if I wanted to. So I chose that rather than go to New York, although almost everybody else was going to New York at that point.

MEH: Let's see – You were talking about Marriage on the Eiffel Tower, and doing the costumes. Do you have any particular memories of that production?

AO: Yes, pretty much so.

MEH: What do you recall?

AO: Well, I remember who was in it. June Rice was there and Tim LaFarge and Albert Levi. Who else was in it? There was music.

MEH: You helped work with the costumes?

AO: Yes. I don't know how I got involved in that, but I enjoyed doing the costumes. They were pretty crude – the top hats were made out of cardboard, painted. All the props were very fragile. You had to be very careful of the way you handled them. I don't think there was – There wasn't any scenery that I recall, just the silver curtain at the back of the dining room.

MEH: There are photographs that Hazel made.

AO: There was a table or something.

MEH: There was a table. There may even have been the top something of the Eiffel Tower.

AO: Oh yes! Yes. That's right. Of course. There would be, wouldn't there? At one point everyone was sitting at the table.

MEH: What about Noah? Do you have any particular remembrances – ? I think you did some masks, didn't you, for Noah?

AO: I didn't do the masks. Victor Kalos did the masks. Victor and Donald Alter. They worked on them together, and I thought the masks were absolutely beautiful. They hung in the dining room after the performance. They were there for quite awhile, like two or three weeks afterwards. Eventually I don't know what happened to them. Probably they picked them up and did something with them. But those were really wonderful.

MEH: Did you work at all with the Light-Sound-Movement Workshop?

AO: No. No. But Wes Huss was involved with Noah, wasn't he?

MEH: I think so. I think M.C. did Marriage on the Eiffel Tower.

AO: Yes. Wes was also in – he performed in that too, and he was a professional actor, wasn't he?

MEH: I don't know if a professional actor, but a professional theatre person.

AO: Yes.

MEH: We've talked a little bit about the '49 summer session when Fuller was there, and then the next summer session was the session that Paul Goodman, Stamos –

AO: Motherwell.

MEH: Clem – Was it Motherwell that summer or the next summer? I think he was there the '51, the next summer.

AO: Oh. Could be.

MEH: I could be confused now. I don't always get it straight.

AO: We had three photographers one summer. Was it the first of those summers?

MEH: That was '51, and that was the summer Motherwell was there, I think, because [OVERTALK]. The summer of '50 was Stamos, Greenberg, Goodman. I think Leo Amino was there that summer.

AO: [AFFIRMATIVE]. Could be. Yes.

MEH: Yes, Stamos would have been teaching painting.

AO: Yes, yes.

MEH: Did you take classes with the summer session people?

AO: Not an awful lot. The year of the photographers I was so involved in doing my own printing and getting ready for my exhibition that I didn't take part in any of the classes, although I sat a lot with them at breakfast time – Callahan and what's his name?

MEH: Siskind.

AO: Siskind, who was very nice. I liked Siskind very much. Callahan, too, and his wife. Who was the third photographer? I can't remember now.

MEH: I'm trying to think of his name. I can see the photograph he did at Black Mountain. I've lost the name myself.

AO: Well, maybe it'll come.

MEH: Motherwell was there that summer.

AO: Yes.

MEH: But you were really busy that summer getting ready to graduate.

AO: Yes, I was. There was a lot of music that summer too, wasn't there?

MEH: I think David Tudor came down to accompany –

AO: Cunningham.

MEH: No, not Cunningham that summer. To accompany Katy that summer.

AO: Yes.

MEH: Yes. He gave some concerts.

AO: [AFFIRMATIVE]. But then he came back – Didn't he come back for the, for when Merce and Company were there? He performed –

MEH: But you have left at that point, hadn't you?

AO: No, no. I was there.

MEH: That was the summer of '52 then?

AO: It probably was.

MEH: No, you left in '51, and Merce was there in '52 and '53, but he came back like in the spring of '51 and gave a – One spring he came back and gave a concert. He was there for maybe a couple of weeks.

AO: Right. That's what I'm remembering. He came with John Cage, too.

MEH: Yes.

AO: Yes.

MEH: Okay. So unless I have it – You left as soon as you graduated? Or you stayed?

AO: No, I stayed for awhile after I graduated.

MEH: Did you teach weaving at some point?

AO: Yes I did, that summer that – Yes. What's – Ben Shahn's daughter, and I can't remember what her name was, she was quite a young girl. She was like twelve or thirteen. She was in my class. She got very interesting in weaving. I don't know what she's doing now. I don't think it's Juliette Shahn, whose illustrations I see in the *New Yorker* all the time. I keep wondering if that was she.

MEH: I think one of his daughters – I'm not sure, I think it may be. It may be one of his daughters.

AO: It could well be. Just very nice little vignettes in the *New Yorker*. I see her name all the time. There was a woman who had been to Russia in my class, and I don't know what her name was. Also the person who's still weaving in Vermont, or in Maine. In Vermont.

MEH: Bishop. Mary Bishop.

AO: Mary Bishop, yes. Friends of mine see her quite often, and she always sends her regards although I haven't been in touch with her for years.

MEH: There was someone else I was thinking of, I was going to ask you about. Let's go back – Do you remember anything about the debacle the summer that Paul Goodman was there?

AO: Well, I know there was an awful lot going on that summer.

MEH: You weren't student moderator then.

AO: Nnnnnnnnoo, I don't think I was. No, I don't know who was, as a matter of fact.

MEH: I'm not sure. What about music, did you take any music? Tudor, or Lou Harrison, or – Bimbus had left at that point.

AO: No, I know that Erwin Bodky took over the chorus at one point, and I think people were rather disillusioned with him. I don't know why that was exactly, because he was a rather interesting man. But I don't think he was a very good teacher, or maybe he was terribly impatient with us, I don't know, as nonprofessionals. We were certainly that – most of us, anyway.

MEH: What did you do on the work program?

AO: I worked in the kitchen. That was the summer that Vera and – not Barbara Rice, the other Rice –

MEH: June.

AO: June Rice. June and Vera took over the kitchen and started doing the purchasing. They fired George, who was one of the cooks, who was hopeless as a cook. I think, I forget who he was married to, but I think she was booted, too, so that just left one cook. So the kitchen was kind of short-handed, and I

thought it would be interesting to work in a kitchen. So, I used to do one – one lunch a week, on the cook's day off, and somebody else did dinner. I used to make potato and leek soup quite often, to the point where people started asking for another soup. But I thought it was a very good soup. Madame Goldowski gave the recipe for piroshky, so we would have someone, I think that the cook, I'm trying to remember what the cook's name was –

MEH: There was Malrey Few.

AO: Malrey. Yes. She would make the piroshky before she went off for her day off, and so they were heated up for the lunch. So, those with potato and leek soup, and that was a very nice lunch. Then during vacation times, I cooked full-time. That was my job when – But there were only like maybe four or five students left. Ten at the most. It was fairly easy. I used to wash the dishes, too, which was a bigger job than actually cooking. So, that was one of my projects, and then I worked on the farm one summer with Ruth Asawa. We used to get up around six o'clock to, to work in the fields for an hour or so in the morning. Then one of my jobs was to bring the cows home at night. That was an ordeal and a half, because they were so ornery and they would do anything except go where they were supposed to go. They were dying to get in the barn to get milked, but they would just go in every single direction. [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION]

MEH: What do you think about the college really worked or what did not work, as you look back?

AO: Well what didn't work were all these personalities and backbiting and fighting, and it seemed to happen every spring. It was almost like a rite of spring that

something would happen in the community and the community was sort of divided into two fighting forces. I thought that was very unfortunate, and it made everybody very unhappy.

MEH: Was this more faculty or faculty and students? Did students have to take sides?

AO: I think that students felt they had – they did take sides, whether they – Some of the students would just think it was all perfectly ridiculous and not get involved, because that wasn't why they were there. But a lot of students got very involved in the fighting, too. I guess it happened from the very beginning of Black Mountain College. I think that there were always segments of the college that left because they felt that they were being ousted or that they had lost out in what they wanted to do. It wasn't just while I was there, surely.

MEH: What were the issues? What sort of things did people fight over?

AO: Well, that's what was upsetting, because after it was all over, people would say "Now what was that all about?" I think, you know, it's the same thing that happens on a world scale too. The issues get so mixed, and at the end you don't know what the issue was, really. But there were – here were more conservative elements in the faculty and (than?) more unconservative, non-conservative. I think that was part of the, always the thing that caused factions.

MEH: What do you think did work about the college?

AO: What worked was the absolute freedom to do what you really and truly wanted to do, and if – I thought several times there were – There were students who just didn't really want to do anything, and interestingly enough, they never

stayed very long because I think it got to be totally boring. If you weren't there to work at something, you weren't that interested in the community. If you were serious about working at something and you had all the freedom in the world to do it, I mean, you could set up your own program, as I did when I decided that I wanted to graduate and I laid out what my project was going to be as a graduation project. I think that the physical environment of the mountains was quite wonderful, and it certainly had an influence on the community – that beautiful springtime. The most incredible place to be in the spring.

MEH: What do you think was the effect on the college of its being so isolated?

AO: Well, I think in order to do something like Black Mountain College, you have to be a little isolated in order for it to work properly. If we'd been closer to an active Asheville – I mean Asheville has certainly changed over the years. In our time, or in the time of Black Mountain, it wasn't really much of an intellectual community or a community that would stimulate the school. So, we were very isolated in that respect, but I think that that's part of what worked there, that we made our own environment. With some stimulating teachers in the community, the students were stimulated, too.

MEH: Before we leave, there was another question I had in mind to ask you. What was it? Oh, we've talked some about faculty. You said you worked on the farm in the morning with Ruth. What was Ruth Asawa like then, as a student?

AO: Well, Ruth was one of the inspirations of my student life. She was such a hard worker, for one thing, and such an interesting, open kind of person. I can remember she was setting up an exhibition in the exhibition house in front of

the Studies Building, and she said – One afternoon or one evening she said, "I might be there in the morning," she said, "so when you're on your way to the farm," she said, "would you just stop by and wake me up." She had been setting up her exhibition all night and she was sound asleep on the floor. I hesitated really to wake her up. I thought, if she's been up all night, she would not want to go work on the farm. But I went in and she kind of woke up when she heard me come in, and she hopped up and she came walking up to the farm, and we worked for an hour. I said, "Do you really want to do this?" She said, "Oh yes, that's fine, I'm okay." I think that's the way she was – that – Part of it is probably Japanese, the determination to do what you set out to do and no matter what happened, you did just that. I still write to her occasionally, and she writes back. I haven't seen her for many years.

MEH: Are there other students you remember in particular?

AO: Well, I was thinking about the people I really loved, you know, and I still do, you know, like Vera and Paul Williams, and Nick Cernovich. Vera and Nick came to Key West one time, together, like three or four years ago. They had a big fight while they were there, or at least Vera did. I don't think, I think Nick just kind of wrote it off as Vera. But Vera got very emotional and she got very impatient with Nick. I can remember when we were doing lighting in my garden – in our garden, and Nick said "Oh, let me do it." So Bill took him to the local hardware store, and he bought all kinds of stuff. By the time they came back, Bill was absolutely exasperated because Nick was so slow about making decisions and everything and being very demanding of the help in the hardware store. Bill

said, "It was very embarrassing." But Nick was being a professional. So, then that night he was working in the garden, and Vera made dinner. She was getting really hot under the collar because he refused to come. He wanted to finish the lighting before he came to sit down. Finally, she just yelled at him, and she said, "The whole dinner is going to get ruined if you don't come now," so he finally came.

MEH: You were right back at Black Mountain.

AO: Yes.

MEH: And what was that argument about anyway? Right. So you left at the end of the 1951 summer session – But one other thing, that was the – Had you stayed in touch – That was the summer Rauschenberg came back to Black Mountain with Twombly, the summer of '51.

AO: Yes.

MEH: Had you stayed in touch with him in the couple of years?

AO: Not in the time that he was away. But the minute he came back he wanted to gather me up again, and I had told Hazel that as much as I loved Bob, and I really did, I didn't want him to take over my life like he did before. So I kind of resisted and kept a certain distance. But Sue at that point had had Christopher, her boy, and he was a real problem because he had colic. Every time you put him down, he would cry. So I helped out a little bit. Then Sue and I spent some time together. Bob went away at one point, I think because he couldn't stand the baby crying all the time. He just made an excuse to go away somewhere. While he was away, Sue and I spent quite a bit of time together and I sort of

helped out with the baby as much as I could. After I left Black Mountain, we were still quite good friends, and I would go to New York and stay with them occasionally. Then when they separated, I would go and stay with Sue quite a bit of the time – from time to time. But the first time I went to New York to stay with them, they had a small apartment on the West Side. They had gotten a commission from either Bonwit Teller or Lord & Taylor, I forget whose windows they were doing, but they had done these huge things on what do you call it?

MEH: Blueprint paper.

AO: Blueprint paper. They were absolutely beautiful. They were developing them in the shower of the bathroom, and the bathroom was a total mess. Their apartment was. There was work all over the place, and they were actually painting in there and doing other things and cooking and – But it was – as always, it was a very stimulating atmosphere. I went with Bob and Sue to Life magazine. They had an interview with the editor of "Speaking of Pictures," which was a weekly thing. They got all excited about the blueprints, and they did an issue with the blueprints, and I think there were just kind of like a couple of blueprints. But that was fun. I went with them to the interview and everything. The woman got very excited. She thought they were wonderful. But they had done these for the windows; I think it was Lord & Taylor. I don't think Bonwit Teller had sort of come into the new generation at that point.

MEH: So you finished. In the summer of '51, you graduated, and then what did you do?

AO: I went to live in Boston with Vera and Paul, and then Stan Vanderbeek came to stay with us, and Nick Cernovich came.

MEH: Were you all there at the same time?

AO: All there at the same time. Most of the beds were on the floor – just mattresses on the floor.

MEH: Now was this the Hyde Park house?

AO: At Hyde Park, yes. [AFFIRMATIVE] Who else was there? There were – Well, Tommy Jackson lived in Cambridge at that point, and Tommy Jackson was always my pal. He would come very often to the house, and he was madly in love with Paul Williams's MG. He would do anything to drive that car around. He was, he was very much in love with this girl who was at Black Mountain. I can't remember what her name was. She was a tiny little blond girl, very pretty. He was just mad about her. I was always – I was very much in love with Tommy. So one time when I was in Boston, I was working in a darkroom in Boston in a portrait studio. I got out of work – I never got to see daylight. I'd go to work in the morning, like at eight o'clock, and the sun was just sort of coming up, and by the time I got out of the darkroom at night it was evening. So I called Tommy from a public telephone thing to say I was going to go out to Cambridge. He answered, "Hello," and I said, "Hi, it's Andy." He said, "Oh goddamit, I said I don't want to talk to you!" and he slammed down the telephone, and I was terribly, terribly hurt. I thought, "What, what was that all about?" He was waiting for a call from this girl and was thoroughly disappointed that it wasn't she. Then I called him back right away, and I said, "That was a

helluva thing to do, and I don't want to ever talk to you again, blah, blah, blah." Then he got very upset. So I went back to Hyde Park and in about an hour he showed up. He didn't say anything about this thing that happened, except – for some reason we were sitting in the car, I don't know why we were sitting in a car – but I said, "it was a really heartrending thing for me because I'm very much in love with you." He said sort of like "Yes, I know." But our relationship after that was just the same as it had always been, you know, and we would occasionally – Paul built a house on Cape Cod and from time to time we'd go there, stay there for a weekend or something. Sometimes Tommy and I would just go down by ourselves and spend like Friday and Saturday and come back on Sunday or something of that sort. So we, and we did a lot of little car trips together. Sometimes we'd get to use the MG, which was very exciting for Tommy. Of course, he had to have the top down. At that point going down to the Cape on Route 6 was quite wonderful, because it's very curvy, and it was a small road and there wasn't an awful lot of traffic in those days.

MEH: Were you involved at all in the building of the house on Cape Cod?

AO: A little bit, but not an awful lot. We would go down when it was sort of half built and just kind of camp out there. But I didn't – I think I might have done some painting, because I usually sort of ended up painting walls and things. But Betsy still lives there.

MEH: Right. What were you doing for a living at that point, in Boston?

AO: I worked in the, in this darkroom until I couldn't stand it anymore. I thought that it would help me professionally in a way, that I would have time to do some of

my own work afterwards, but it wasn't set up that way at all. I mean, it was just a rather boring job – touching up portraits of people. So, then I got a job in Goodspeed's Book Shop, which was a rare book store. I worked wrapping books to send off to England to be rebound and things of that sort – in the shipping department for awhile. Then I guess Mr. Goodspeed thought that my talents were not being used properly. They had a framing department, and so he graduated me to the framing department, which was on the top floor of this building. I did the framing there for, oh, I guess two or three years, and lived practically across the street. This was on Beacon Hill, and on the top floor of an old brick house in what were the servants' quarters. This was after I moved into town from Hyde Park, when Paul and Vera moved to New York. We had talked about starting a gallery, and for awhile they were very interested in it. My job was to find a space in Boston that would work, and I spent a good part of the winter looking at various places and trying to decide whether we could attract people. Wonderful spaces were available, but in funny places. They wouldn't be so funny in this day and age because you could get people to go there, but then it was a different situation. Finally I found this house on Mount Vernon Street, at the foot of Beacon Hill, and it had an entrance on Charles Street, which is the main street out of town. I thought this would be ideal, because we could actually live in the house, and it was relatively cheap. I mean, I think it was like fifty thousand dollars. At that point – I got all excited about this and I went to see the house several times. I got Paul and Vera to go and see it, too, and there would have been enough room for us to live in the house and the ground

– it wasn't the basement, because it was actually above street level – would have made a marvelous gallery, and there were a couple of rooms in this part of the house too. So at that point I thought, "Could we do better than this?" Paul had the money, actually, to do it if he wanted to, and it was at that point that Paul and Vera decided that they really wanted to go to New York to live, rather than continue living in Boston. So at that point, I started a gallery in Cambridge, and Paul gave me five thousand dollars to start.

MEH: That was the Boylston Street –

AO: The Boylston Street Print Gallery. I went to England that summer with the idea of buying a collection of prints and things. Then I went on to Paris, where I had friends, and I stayed with them for a month and then came back and set up the gallery.

MEH: What did the gallery show? What did it do?

AO: Well, it started off as a print gallery because that was the sort of thing that I was connected with at Goodspeed's. Also a friend of mine had a huge collection of old prints that belonged to was it her grandmother, or – yes it was her grandmother. They were just in big portfolios and there were all kinds of things. There were Rembrandt etching and some very good things and a lot of things that were not particularly wonderful but very decorative. I thought, “Well, this could be the foundation of a print collection.” So that's the way it started, and I took the things on consignment originally, and then I decided that I should try and buy them all if I could. She didn't want very much money. I think she wanted two hundred dollars for the lot. There were some – there were some

really quite wonderful drawings, as it turned out, in this collection. Anyway, then I had a gallery so people started approaching me about having contemporary shows. Bob Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns came to Cambridge at one point and stayed with me, and they wanted to have a show in the gallery. I said, "You're just beating your head against the wall, because there isn't anybody in my field of knowledge who would be interested in those things in Boston." This was way before they had any sort of reputation at all. I said, "You should find a gallery in New York." So they did. They took me at my word , and I could have had an interesting show.

MEH: But you did show some Black Mountain people.

AO: Yes, I did. Not an awful lot, but I did, some, yes.

MEH: What were the years of the gallery?

AO: Hmmmm, well, let's see. I left Black Mountain in '51, [OVERTALK] '52, it was like 19- – I'm trying to think. Well, it was in the late fifties, because that's when I first started coming to Nantucket in the summertime. There wasn't any reason for me to be open in Cambridge as far as a gallery was concerned, and I felt I had to find a job doing something to support myself. A friend of mine had a shop on Nantucket, and she said, "Well, why don't you have a gallery in my shop on Nantucket and you can do framing there?" So, I did that my first summer here. I rented the gallery as a place for someone to live in, and it turned out to be Kaffe Fassett. Do you know who he is? Well, he – very famous now, as a knitter, but he did – does all kinds of wild, beautiful things. He's very good with color. [IRRELEVANT REMARK] Anyway, he's done several books on

knitting, and he lectures all over the United States. He lives in London. Interestingly enough, my former associate, Sam Kasten, who worked at The Looms, on his own discovered Kaffe, and he and his family have become very good friends with Kaffe and his partner. When they go to England they stay there. But this connection over a long period of time was very interesting.

MEH: So he really did the gallery, while you were here in –

AO: [OVERTALK] He rented the gallery, but he lived in it. He didn't – Yes, and I was here in Nantucket for the summer.

MEH: And the shop you were working in was called –

AO: The Cockeyed Dove. It was right behind the bank at the head of Main Street. It was quite a successful small gift shop and it had – it was a <u>beautiful</u> building. It <u>is</u> a beautiful building still. It's part of a Greek Revival building. There was another part which got torn down, I guess, over the years, but it has these marvelous Corinthian columns on the second floor with these oval windows – not oval, but arched windows on the top, and the space inside on the second floor was really <u>very</u> nice. It was a nice gallery, too.

MEH: So, how did you come to stay in Nantucket?

AO: Well, I met Bill Euler at the Woodbox, which was an inn and a restaurant. In MY second summer that I was here, I started cooking there one night a week, the cook's night off, on Thursday night. Bill was the maitre-d there in the restaurant, and they served breakfast and dinner, and Mrs. Toutein was the owner. She said, "I need help on Thursday nights, pal, which is steak night." The restaurant only had one meal, unless you were vegetarian or something. We'd always

have a fish on meat nights, but Thursday night was steak night and we used to get these huge sirloin steaks which were this thick and broil them and then slice them to serve them. It was very exciting, because I'd never done anything like that before – except cook at Black Mountain, which was quite different.

MEH: Potato soup.

AO: Potato soup!

MEH: Quite different.

AO: Yes. But then Mrs. Toutein started giving us – She'd take off Thursdays herself and her daughter and I would start cooking by ourselves. Then eventually I was cooking on Thursday night. Then –

MEH: Now was this the summertime still? Were you still going back to Boston?

AO: This was summertime still, and I was going – For those first two summers I went back to Cambridge in the fall, and the gallery was still running. Then the third summer, Bill and I decided that we wanted to stay on Nantucket. He was working at the Plaza, at that time. He was the reservations manager at the Plaza. At that time, the Hilton Hotels owned the Plaza, or were running the Plaza, and they wanted him to go to Havana to run the Hilton in Havana. He didn't want to go to Havana. He'd been once before, and he said that was it. It didn't interest him. I had this gallery that wasn't doing the greatest business in the world, and so we decided that we'd try and spend the winter on Nantucket. That winter we stayed at The Woodbox. The following summer we were desperately looking for a place to rent and couldn't find anything and couldn't find anything. We saw this house that looked kind of abandoned on Bear

Street. I called Gladys Wood, who was the real estate person, and she said, "Well," she said, "it isn't for rent." She said, "But I think – " She said "Let's go look at it," and we climbed in a window. This is a very fragile old lady, at this point. She found a window that was unlocked and we climbed in the window to look at the place. We thought it was wonderful. A couple of days later she said "Well," she said, "you know what?" She said "The house isn't for rent, but it's for sale." The man who owned it was in the hospital in Boston and his nephew, who had his power of attorney, had to sell to pay his hospital bills. So, they wanted eight thousand dollars for the house. They wanted eight thousand five hundred dollars for it and the furniture in it, and we said, "Well, we're not really interested in the furniture, but if we're going to pay eight thousand dollars for the house, at least we could – we can pay five hundred dollars for the furniture." Then we thought "Where are we going to get the money from."

[END OF TAPE 2; BEGINNING OF TAPE 3]

AO: So, Bill approached a friend of his who was in the real estate business in New Jersey and asked if he could borrow some money from him, and he gave us the major part of the eight thousand five hundred that we needed that summer to buy the house. So, then we ended up with a house on Nantucket, when we were just looking for a place to rent, with the idea that we were going to go back to the – he was going to go to New York and I was going to go to Cambridge. But our whole life changed at that point. So we asked Mrs. Toutein if we could run the Woodbox as a restaurant and an inn during the winter months. She said "Well," she said, "you're not going to make any money. I know that from

experience." We said. “As long as we can survive, that would be fine. I mean that was all we expected to do, and that winter we broke even, but we didn't make an awful lot of money. But the following year, Walter Beinecke and his wife rented one of the apartments at the Woodbox on a year-round basis and so that was our bread and butter. Then the next year we had a woman who was recovering from a stroke, and she was living in one of the apartments with her nurse. So she paid for our running expenses that year – except that that year I was cooking breakfast, lunch, and dinner to the point where I nearly went out of my mind, because I could not think – I thought what in the world am I going to give her for lunch today? Finally, I asked her if she liked sandwiches, and she said, "Oh, I love sandwiches!" So that helped a lot. Then I got a friend to cook like one night a week, and that gave me a little relief. So, that's the way we started on Nantucket.

MEH: And how did Nantucket Looms come about?

AO; Well, that winter where Walter Beinecke and his wife were staying was the beginning of Nantucket Looms, because Mrs. Beinecke was a weaver, and her ambition was to start a crafts movement on Nantucket, which was one of the things that I always thought would be an ideal thing to start on the island. So, we started Nantucket Looms together, and I was hired to teach ten local people how to weave – and that was the beginning of Nantucket Looms. Then there was a big struggle about finding our market and everything, and then Walter said that he was spending too much money supporting the looms and the weavers and that he was not interested in continuing it. He had found someone

who might want to buy it. I said, "Does that mean that I wouldn't have an option to buy it?" He said, "Oh yes, if you can afford it." Basically what he was interested in was selling the building, because he thought the equipment was, at that point, worthless because of deterioration on the machinery or the equipment. So, I said, "Well how much do you want for the building?" He said, "Well how much do you think it's worth?" I said, "Well I know there's a building up the street which is for sale for three hundred thousand dollars." He said, "Well that's absolutely ridiculous." He said, "I don't want anything near that amount of money." He wanted a hundred thousand dollars for the building which was – in those days that was quite a lot of money. On the other hand, we went to the bank, and the bank manager said that, "You can borrow any amount of money that you want." We had already sort of established a reputation, and he wanted it to continue. Then the board, at the last minute, sat about this loan with other things, and they decided that they only wanted to give us half that amount of money. I said, "Well that's worthless. What we need is the whole amount." So, I approached Paul Mellon. I wrote a letter to him. I was good friends with his wife, Mrs. Mellon, Bunny Mellon, but I only knew him in passing sort of. He was very impressed with my letter, and on the basis of the letter he lent us a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. We paid him off in ten years, with interest. He was very impressed with that, too. I think he thought well, that's probably the last I'll ever see of that money.

MEH: And tell me about – What were your goals at Nantucket Looms? What did you do?

AO; When we were running the Looms, the retail shop, we figured that the actual weaving would pay for half of running the business and that the retail shop would do the rest. Bill and I would go on buying trips. We went to Italy. We went to London. Our theme at one point was Island Crafts, but it didn't have to be – I mean England is an island, so we thought that that was stretching it a little bit, but they had a lot of scrimshaw and things like that in the markets, in the antique markets. We bought a lot of old ivory and brought it back, and you could triple or quadruple the price that we paid for it because we didn't have to sell them within a short period of time. They could be there until someone came along who understood what it was and bought them. So we sold some antiques and we wove things. We wove chaise throws, like that one sitting on the chair over there, which is mohair, and we did hundreds and hundreds of those, I mean, to the point where during the wintertime when we didn't have any business, they would start piling up on the banister upstairs, and I thought "If we sell half of these, I would be surprised." But we had to keep doing it because we had to keep the weavers working – busy – and by the middle of July they were completely gone. So, it helped a great deal that certain people came to The Looms. We collected celebrities, because everybody has to pass the – If they come to Nantucket, they have to go by Nantucket Looms door and so they just wandered in. Jacqueline Kennedy came before – well, the year after Kennedy was assassinated. She came to The Looms with Mrs. Mellon and her decorator, Billy Baldwin, and it caused a sensation. There were

thousands and thousands of – We had to lock the doors. There were people surrounding The Looms on the sidewalk, just waiting to see her.

MEH: Was that on that first visit or – ?

AO: On the first visit. Yes. Because after Kennedy was assassinated she was such a figure, and people couldn't believe that she was on Nantucket shopping at The Looms. So – In fact, that, that first time, they were looking for a place to have a picnic, and we – Bill and I, had that cottage. So they used that cottage for a picnic that year. When they came back the second year, we had this, and they stayed here for their picnic. It was – according to Bunny – it was that visit that she decided to marry Onassis. They discussed it while they were here. But anyway, so people wanted to know what Jackie bought at The Looms. So it's amazing how much of an influence that had as far as our business was concerned. Then we had Presidents's wives coming. Mrs. Johnson came to The Looms with her Secret Service men . She said, "Oh, I want to buy something," and she said "I don't have any cash." She said to one of the Secret Service men, "Can I borrow some money from you?" Then she said, "Remember, I borrowed this money from you!"

MEH: But you were doing custom fabrics for corporate clients?

AO: Yes. For interior decorators. Then we made a connection with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, which was at that time the largest architectural firm in the United States. They had an office in Chicago, New York, and San Francisco. We started doing big jobs. They discovered that we had a ten foot loom, which we could produce a continuing wall of fabric without a seam in it. Because

modern buildings have approximately that height. Between the wallboard and the ceiling finish is about ten feet. So, we produced this fabric which we became famous for which was linen and ramie. We wove hundreds and hundreds of yards of it on a ten-foot loom with two weavers working on it. Usually I was one of the weavers, and Sam, my assistant, was the other end of the loom. So, then we established a reputation for working with architects and interior designers, besides the celebrities.

MEH: And so when did you sell Nantucket Looms? Or –

AO: We didn't sell The Looms. We gave The Looms to Liz. But she bought the building from us.

MEH: So, you sold her the building.

AO: We sold her the building which she has now paid for completely, and it's her business. The business has changed a bit. She does more retail business, and the handweaving part has diminished a little bit, but there are still four weavers working year round. Rebecca Jusco, who is now the Head Weaver, is a Rhode Island School of Design graduate, and her thrust is sort of to keep the continuing tradition of our fabrics more or less the same. That's not to say that she doesn't design fabrics – which she does. But they still have the same sort of feeling that they did when I was designing. And I always thought, "Well, if you – You must do some other things if you want to do other things." She said, "No, I find that very suitable for me – to work within that tradition." So she does.

MEH: Now did you continue photography through the years, or did you – ?

AO: Yes, I did. I sort of still do. I think I take less photographs now than I used to, but I've done a sort of document of the Mellon's farm in Virginia. That was one of the things that I decided I wanted to do. Then just while doing that a good part of their collection was at the farm in Virginia. Most of it now is in the National Gallery or the Yale – British Center at Yale. But then it was mostly at the farm. There was one house that Mr. Mellon used to live in his first marriage and that was turned into a gallery. I mean, a large house full of paintings and drawings and sculpture. He had a large collection of Degas, and he had the original wax of the ballerina, which is very very fragile, because it --

MEH: The wax.

AO: It's the original wax that the, that the bronzes were made from. So he had a bronze side by side with the wax. Wonderful thing to see. Then there were several large paintings of Degas. But the rest of collection was mostly British art, and that's all in the British, the gallery at Yale now. Then Bunny was interested in some American paintings, early American paintings, and a lot of French paintings. The house is Lautrecs and Van Goghs and important things. So, I took photographs all those things too. And, and then I went to Paris once to stay with Bunny in her house in Paris, and she said, "You have to come and see this garden at Versailles that nobody knows about." I said, "There something at Versailles that nobody knows about?" She said, "You'd be surprised." So she took me to what was Louis the Fourteenth's vegetable garden, the *potager du roi*. It was still an active garden, and it was a school for agricultural students. It basically was – Well, they had a huge collection of pear

trees. I counted them once and I came to something like thirty varieties of pears. Some of the trees were almost three hundred years old. I don't know how they survived – and most of them were gone, and they had replanted. But now and then you'd come across a huge trunked tree looking very fragile in a way, you know, not producing many leaves and no more fruit to speak of, but they kept them going. So, I did a whole photographic study on the garden, and Bunny wrote an article about it. Originally, we wanted to do a book about it. *Vogue* – Was it *Vogue*? No, *House and Garden* heard about it and they wanted to do an article, and the editor-in-chief of *House and Garden* at that time got very excited about the whole thing and she said, "I want to do a center article and I want to do pages of photographs of the trees and everything." So, they paid my way to go to Versailles during two seasons to photograph the spring and the fall. You know, the apple and pear trees in bloom and the fruit on the trees in the fall. I said, "Well, what about wintertime? It's absolutely beautiful in the winter with bare trees, especially if there's snow." So they were going to do that, too. So, then the editorship changed, and the new editor didn't want to do any old articles. She said, "And if we do, we want a professional photographer to do them, a staff photographer, not someone that Mrs. Mellon has chosen." So then Bunny and I had a big fight because they wanted to do her article. I guess she had gotten into a bind where they had actually bought her article. Of course, they hadn't bought my photographs, but they'd paid my way, which was quite expensive. Bunny and I got into a fight, and I said, "Are you going to let them use your article without my photographs?" Being a snotty artist. She said,

"I can't get out of it." I thought, and I said to her – we were having this very nice dinner in the living room in their house in New York, and I was in a very happy mood to begin with. She, of course she had to – she was the one who broke this to me, which was a mistake. I mean, someone on the magazine should have done it. But anyway, I said, "You mean to say you'd let them do that? I'm sure that you could have something to do with whether they used the photographs or not." So then we both got very hot tempered, and then we didn't talk to one another for something like four years. Oh, and then in the end, they decided to use the photographs. It was shortly after that. They said they weren't going to use the photographs, and then suddenly it turned out that they were going to use the photographs. At that point Bunny and I weren't talking to one another. We were very close, and we still are now.

MEH: How had you gotten to know her?

AO: Through Billy Baldwin – coming to The Looms. She used a lot of our fabric. I mean – and still does. From time to time she'll need a replacement for something. But I was just looking at a – They have a wonderful house in Antigua, and we did some linen and ramie, the same thing that we used for wall fabric for some upholstery of these chairs that sit out by the pool year round. The original fabric is still on those chairs, and I cannot believe that with all of the use and abuse that they get that that fabric is still holding up. It makes me very pleased. Well, we did a lot of fabrics for that house, and we did a lot of fabrics for the Paris house and for the farm in Virginia. So, that's how we became good friends, and she's a – speaking of landscaping, she is a brilliant

landscaper. If she wasn't someone who didn't have to make a living, she would be a very important landscape architect. But she's 92 now.

MEH: Wow.

AO: Yes. She's still going. She has the house down on the beach, and they had to move it back this – They moved it back about a month ago.

MEH: Looking back, what do you think was the impact of Black Mountain, if any, positive or negative, on the direction your life took later?

AO: Well, I'll tell you, one thing that I thought was that of all the people in my life, the people I went to school with at Black Mountain would probably be the least likely to succeed in life, and the exact opposite is true. I mean, so many of those people have established a great reputation and make a living doing the thing that they want to do. When the Beineckes wanted to get out of the Nantucket Looms, Bill was very much against our buying it because he was a very practical-minded person. He said, "Well, what makes you think that you can make a living from something that has cost Walter Beinecke something like a hundred thousand dollars a year loss?" I said, "Because we have to make a living from it." I thought about all of the people that I knew at Black Mountain who had made a life for themselves doing the thing that they wanted to do, and I think it's just trusting to luck and having determination to have something work. I think that was an important lesson that I learned at Black Mountain.

MEH: Are there things about Black Mountain that you recall – anecdotes or events, things that I haven't asked you about? Questions you think I might have asked?

AO: Well, just offhand I can't think of anything, but I'm sure there are lots of things that I could say. I don't know. I feel like I've talked too much, as it is. But also one of the interesting things is that I've maintained a kind of love for a lot of the people I knew there, although I don't necessarily see them as much. But over the years I have a continuing relationship with people, and at times when I think well, I probably won't hear from that person any more, or they won't hear from me, suddenly they come back into my life again. I think that that's an important thing. I was terrified to go to the reunions. I just thought I couldn't cope with that. It's not the sort of thing that I do very well. I don't like parties for one thing. Ray Johnson was a person who came into my life when he decided to come back to Black Mountain briefly, and he was only there for like a couple of weeks and became a good friend over the years. When I'd go to New York I'd see him and we had – when I had a gallery in Cambridge, he and Richard Lippold would occasionally come to Cambridge. I'd drive back with them to New York, and so I saw them quite a lot at that time.

MEH: Did you ever exhibit his work at your gallery?

AO: No, I didn't, but I still have a little collection of his stuff, because he wrote all the time. Someone contacted me who was going to do a book. I think it was a book or an exhibition in New York. I can't remember. But then he never wrote back. I said I did have some things and I would be willing to lend them, but then nothing happened. I don't know whether it actually happened in New York – I didn't read anything about it.

MEH: What about Norman Solomon. Do you have any particular memories of Norman?

AO: Yes, I always thought that Norman was a little creepy. I shouldn't say that.

MEH: He was – Everybody says that.

AO: I had this kind of fascination about Norman, because he was so creepy, maybe. I don't know. I've always wondered what it was about him that I didn't like. Although I had a perfectly good relationship with him. I gather that he became very good friends with Ray in New York, at one point.

MEH: At that point, did you feel that, from the time you came in '49 until you left in '51, that the college changed at all?

AO: I had the feeling that it was going to change dramatically pretty soon, after I left. I mean not that – not because of my leaving, surely – but that there was a new regime taking over. I guess that was actually true. Olson became more and more important to what was left of the school. So I guess that was – Black Mountain was always in kind of transition and changing from one thing to another.

MEH: Was there any supervision of student life when you were there? Were you basically on your own to –

AO: We were pretty much on our own. Occasionally, the faculty would decide that something was – Oh, well, there <u>was</u> the thing about no hitchhiking, because someone had had a bad experience coming from Asheville hitchhiking. I forget what the whole story was about that. Have you heard about that?

MEH: There were earlier hitchhiking problems, but that was in the forties, in the early forties.

AO: Yes. It was before I was there.

MEH: Yes, no, there were some difficult incidents.

AO: Yes, so hitchhiking was not allowed which I thought I was kind of silly. Then I think at one point there was something about drinking. You know, Black Mountain was dry, at that point, but there was a little bar in one of the other towns and occasionally –

MEH: Was that Roy's? Or Ma Peek's?

AO: Yes, I think so. Occasionally, there would be a group of people who'd take off in a car and go there. That was kind of frowned on. I don't know why it was frowned on necessarily, but, I mean, something came up about that. Various faculty members thought that was not a very good idea.

MEH: There's a lot of debate now as to – Some people say essentially after Goodman was there that people who were gay could be out and much more free, and some say, "Yes." What was the situation then? Did you feel very comfortable at the college?

AO: Yes, I never [OVERTALK] felt it was much of an issue. What you did in private was your own business, and I had a relationship with Nick on and off, and with Ray Johnson. Nobody ever said anything about anything, and I was – If there was a lot of gay life at Black Mountain, I wasn't necessarily aware of it, because I think I was so attached platonically with Hazel that I think that some people thought that that was my relationship, I mean my permanent relationship, and

so if there was anything else going on at the school – I mean, as far as Paul Goodman was concerned, he was just someone I knew, and he didn't necessarily talk very openly with me about homosexuality. He may have with others. I remember Paul Leser was in love with Fee Dawson, and in a very sort of tortured way because Fee was not particularly involved, in a way. I guess that they had a little bit of a relationship. I don't know, but I don't really know. But I know that Paul was suffering, and he came to my study one day and he was very unhappy, and I said, "Well I can understand, you know. I have this very difficult relationship with Nick myself," and he grabbed my head and he said "Oh, you poor boy!" I thought "Well I don't feel that desperate about it!" But obviously he did.

MEH: You went into the village of Black Mountain to church with Bob Rauschenberg?

AO: To Asheville.

MEH: To Asheville. It was a Baptist church in Asheville that you went to.

AO: Yes, yes.

MEH: Did you frequently leave the campus? Did you go into Black Mountain or into Asheville or the area?

AO: We used to go to the movies. We'd go with Delores. Delores had to sit up in the balcony and we would wave and she would wave . Sometimes we – I can't remember what the situation was, but I was on the bus with Delores. We were waiting for the bus to come. I guess we were in Asheville. I did an exhibition at the library at one point of objects, utilitarian objects of good design which you could buy in places like the five and dime and various other places in Asheville,

which was not a very brilliant place to shop. Delores and I were coming back on the bus, and she had to sit in the back of the bus so I thought, "Well I'll sit as far forward in the bus as I can and we can wave to one another." Then we both got off the bus at the same place and carried on by ourselves. But we didn't – For awhile we went to a lot of movies. I don't know why we did especially. Because then, you know, we had – That was before we had this connection with the Museum of Modern Art and we used to rent films from them, and so that kind of took off going to the movies in Asheville, unless you really wanted to see a shoot 'em up movie.

MEH: Actually, another question I was going to ask you, was there any film making going on at Black Mountain?

AO: Yes, there was. Some. I think that Hazel was interested in doing movies at one point – film. I did a couple of things with a movie camera. I did one of Tim LaFarge dancing in the lake. I don't know whatever happened to it. Maybe Hazel had it, because I never had a copy of it. I don't think it was very good. Then what el- – I did something else. Oh, yes, of the willow tree on the path to the Studies Building, with Mae West in the background. It was just a film of the willow tree moving in the breeze, and that was it. But it was quite beau- – I mean the scene was quite beautiful, but I don't – I can't remember that I ever saw the results of it. I think I did. Not wildly interesting. I've always been very interested in movies, and at another time I would have probably gotten involved in making films. I heard this fascinating interview the other night, the other afternoon, with – on NPR – with what's her name, Terry Gross. She was

interviewing the cinematographer who had done a lot of Woody Allen movies, and he also had done Francis Ford Coppola's, two of the famous movies. I forget what they're called. But he was wonderful. It was very interesting to hear him. It was marvelous to hear what he was saying about Woody Allen. He said it was like a vacation, making films with him because he was so easy and so casual about it, and everyone enjoyed working with him. Hmm. I wouldn't have thought that, but –

MEH: You would have thought the opposite.

AO: Yes. Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]