

Interviewee: MARTHA RITTENHOUSE TREICHLER
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF CASSETTE]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION] Martha, how did you hear about Black Mountain?
Or come to be there?

MRT: We read about it in an article in the Readers' Digest. I was planning on going to
one of our church schools, and I went there for a couple of years after I
graduated from high school, and thought about Black Mountain and thought it
sounded like a great place, and so I think I got there in the fall of '48 and left at
the end of the year in June '49.

MEH: Okay, so where did you go to school? Where did you grow up?

MRT: I grew up on the Eastern Shore of Maryland on a farm, and the college that I'd
gone to before was Bridgewater College, Virginia.

MEH: Okay, and you said "one of our church schools." Was it a denominational
school?

MRT: Yes, yes. The Church of the Brethren. My ancestors were Mennonites and
Church of the Brethren who came over in the 1600s.

MEH: That's something you would have in common with the person in Elmira,
because her family were Mennonites in Pennsylvania. So maybe you do have
some things in common.

MRT: Yes. That's interesting, yes.

MEH: Okay. I'm on a Mennonite trip now. So you—The article probably was the Louis
Adamic article in Readers' Digest. A lot of people read that article.

MRT: I'm sure it must have been.

MEH: You said "we" read. Was that like you and your parents [OVERTALK]?

MRT: My family, yes, my mother read it, you know, and my father was interested, too.

MEH: Do you remember anything about the process of applying to the college?

MRT: Oh yes, yes. They were very helpful, you know. It seems to me I paid only
about fifteen hundred dollars or something. Isn't that amazing?

MEH: That was a lot of money then, though. So did you visit the college before you
went?

MRT: No, no. Just got on the train all by myself and went there.

MEH: That's one question I ask people: how did you get down there. You took the
train?

MRT: Yes. Then after that I usually went by bus. It was a pretty long trip, and I can
remember I slept most of the way. I can remember one bus driver when I got off
said, "Well goodbye, sleepyhead!"

MEH: Did you catch it in Washington? Or did you—

MRT: I think so.

MEH: Because a lot of students remember—

MRT: Or maybe Baltimore even. Maybe Baltimore.

MEH: Students remember coming from the North that they had to change in Washington to the Southern Railway, where it was segregated—where the trains were segregated.

MRT: Yes. I found the buses—I found that very painful because I was too young to know what to do when the bus driver would be very upset with a black couple for getting on the wrong bus, and talk terrible to them, you know, and I felt that I should have spoken up but I didn't feel that I had quite the moral authority to do it. Oh, the South was—that was not a good aspect of it.

MEH: So did you have any idea what you wanted to study?

MRT: Oh, yes, I was interested in art and writing.

MEH: You took—Tell me about the courses that you took.

MRT: I took writing from Charles Olson. They started out with Edward Dahlberg, who was the English teacher there, but the students didn't like him, and he didn't like them and he left after, oh, it couldn't have been more than a couple of months.

MEH: I think it was a couple of weeks. [LAUGHS]

MRT: Well it certainly wasn't very long.

MEH: So did you take his class?

MRT: Yes, I did.

MEH: What do you think, why do you think things didn't gel?

MRT: Well, I don't know what he expected of us, but I think that the students were not narrow-minded about what they expected. I think that he just wasn't a good teacher. I tried to read his book afterwards and it wasn't really bad. He made passes at some of the girls, and I know I wrote about it in my memories here, about—One of the things that he would say, he wanted to shake us up—He would say "Be freer. Let go!" or something like that. Well, we weren't quite sure what his motives were in saying that, you know. But I thought it was very interesting that after that, Mrs. Corkran defended him and said that he had had a breakup in his marriage, and she felt sorry for him and just painted this picture of this poor old soul, you know, and we didn't see him that way at all.

MEH: So what was Olson like?

MRT: Oh, he was a wonderful teacher. But what he was like physically was very imposing because he must have been about seven feet tall and very broad, and he had a moustache and he was just—you know, visited with the students between class too, and would talk and discuss. He never put us down. We could just—we just were just so hungry for his opinion. We trusted him about everything. We would say "Well what do you think of this? What do you think of this writer? This writer? This writer?" [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION] His teaching method was to have us bring our writing to class. We had to write out of class. Then we would read what we'd written, and he would critique it and the other students would critique it, and I liked that very much so that when I taught English myself, I did that because I thought it was so—what a wonderful method, you know. It was very good.

- MEH:** But he was just there on weekends that year—I mean like one long weekend a month?
- MRT:** You know, I don't remember that. I thought we met once a week. You know, I just don't remember that but you have the documentation so you'd know that. But I'm sorry I don't remember that.
- MEH:** So you took writing with Olson.
- MRT:** Yes, and I took a couple of art classes with Josef Albers. Color class, and drawing and painting. When I tried to remember the different ways he broke up his art classes, I think maybe for a semester he would do color. And, you know, he did write a book called *Color*, which I think he put some of his ideas, you know, on paper. But he was a wonderful teacher too.
- MEH:** Why do you think so? Because he made us work, you know. He did very much the same thing. We had to bring work to class. We had to do things. In his color class, we worked with colored paper a lot, and he even supplied us with some of the paper. His theory was that before we learned to paint, we had to practice in using color, and that—he used the color to make the painting move in the way we wanted it to move, you know. Then he did a drawing class, of course, which was entirely different. That was very good. I can remember one of the interesting things, and I wrote about that. My memory is that at first he was—I was using the paint to draw, you know. I hadn't gotten his concept of using the color to make the shape and move and et cetera. When you finally get—he thought you were catching on, he would say, "She comes," you know. I can remember that Bob Rauschenberg and he sometimes did not always agree, and he thought Bob was just too wild and everything. One day Bob brought a color study, and I can remember it was on black paper and it was sort of wedges of yellow and chartreuse and they sort of danced across the pages in rows. Albers was just entranced, and he said, "Wow, Bob, how did you do it!" Bob said, thinking very hard, "Well, I held it as tight as I could and then I wiggled a little bit." We all thought that was great that he—
- MEH:** That's interesting, because you hear so much about how Albers criticized Bob Rauschenberg's work. It's good to know that he—
- MRT:** He didn't have any dead goats at Black Mountain, you know. He was painting, you know. But he did paint—For instance, I can remember one of the students was Delores Fullman, I think that was her name. He was painting a picture of Delores that was almost life-size, and, you know, he just painted with a palette knife sort of, you know. I thought it was great, but—
- MEH:** Rauschenberg?
- MRT:** He didn't paint that for class. That was outside of class, because he worked and painted outside of class.
- MEH:** Rauschenberg.
- MRT:** Yes.
- MEH:** I doubt if that survived. It would be wonderful if it did.
- MRT:** Yes, it would. Because at Black Mountain one of the things that I wanted to write about was the parties, because almost every Saturday night they had parties, and the parties were just wonderful, you know. Because they often would have a costume party. How many colleges would you have students

spending time making a costume. I mean—There people weren't ashamed to make a costume.

MEH: Are there parties in particular that you remember?

MRT: I remember one that was just black and white, and I can remember trying to think of one tall student who made himself a headdress in black and white, and he was tall to start with, and he had this headdress that must have been two feet tall in black and white and it was just gorgeous. He was just—everybody thought this was marvelous.

MEH: Do you remember your costume for the party?

MRT: Not the black and white one. But I can remember when we had a cave man party, and I can remember that Bill and I gathered just a bushel of these big rhododendron leaves and I sewed rhododendron leaves all over my two-piece bathing suit and all over his trunks, and, you know, it was a lot of work. Other people were working just as hard for their costumes too. [LAUGHS] Then we waltzed a lot. Herr Bodky played waltzes. And Charlotte Schlesinger, who had a nickname that I can't remember right now—I bet Bill could remember.

MEH: Bimbus.

MRT: Bimbus! Right. When she decided to quit, we all went to her apartment to sort of say goodbye and she started to play waltzes. She had to work the entire night. I mean she must have played for hours. I can remember I had on a pair of slipper socks, unfortunately, and I must have had a blister the size of a fifty cent piece on the bottom of my foot, but it was worth it. But she just played, and we waltzed.

MEH: In her apartment.

MRT: In her apartment. But the teachers were not only good teachers, but I thought that they respected each other, because I know Madame Goldowski, who taught me French, when she said that my French accent improved, because I didn't really speak French—I had taken French a lot and I read it well, but I didn't really speak it at all. She told me that my French accent improved, and I told her that was because of my linguistics class, and she told Frank, you know, who—Frank Rice, who was the linguistics teacher, and he was very pleased—There was something else. Oh—In Olson's class, I had been interested in Villon when I was doing French literature at Bridgewater, and I had bought an Old French dictionary and I was trying to translate it, and it's very very difficult because the language has changed a lot. I mean even an Old French dictionary isn't quite old enough to be sure that you're translating Villon properly. So, Olson asked Natasha to help me, and she did, you know—So they didn't hesitate to ask each other to help.

MEH: What was Madame like?

MRT: Well, she was about four feet six, and she had white hair piled on top of her head, and she always wore little gold diamond studs in her ears. She liked me because I always did the very elementary written exercises every week. I mean they weren't that much trouble to do, so why not? Right? Then the rest of the class we would just talk in French, because my—my English, you know, was probably as good as her—I mean my French and her English were about

equivalent. So we spoke in French. That was the best. She was just quite a little gossip. So—

MEH: I recently heard that, that she really loved to gossip.

MRT: She didn't mind mentioning names. Let's put it that way. I just—I would just pretend to be shocked, and she would be delighted.

MEH: So this was like a tutorial, a one-on-one [OVERTALK].

MRT: Yes. I would say that I made a *faux pas*. Ah, *non, non, mademoiselle, non, non, non. Pas de pour pas? Une faute*, You know, a *faux pas* was some terrible thing. You didn't make a *faux pas*, you'd *faute*. [LAUGHS] She was delightful. But a couple of times I forgot French class. The first time, Bob Rauschenberg's girlfriend Susan, and I can't remember Susan's last name—

MEH: Weil.

MRT: Weil, right. They had a car, and that was wonderful. So, when they were ever going to Asheville, you know, it was an opportunity to go, to, you know, catch up on life's necessities. So on the way back, I realized that I'd forgotten French class, and I was just so upset that they were ready to throw me out of that car. "If you do not shut up about that French class—" So I went up there, and Madame did forgive me. [LAUGHS]

MEH: She taught in her house?

MRT: In her house, yes. We went there. I don't know why, but she threw out some of the French students, and I think it was because they didn't write those little exercises that she thought were part of learning French grammar.

MEH: So getting back then to Albers, do you have other recollections of him in terms of just his method of teaching, or his personality, what he was like?

MRT: Well, I certainly liked him. I mean I can remember when the end of the year came I wanted to go and say goodbye to him. So I went up to say, you know, "Thank you. I've enjoyed your classes and learned so much," and all that and everything, and his response was to give me a kiss on the cheek and say, "Stay healthy!" You know, and I just felt a little bit put down by that, you know, about—But then I thought "Well, why?" you know. It was perfectly obvious that I was just a sort of a healthy farm girl, you know, and whatever. [LAUGHS] I just thought—But I just learned a lot. Interestingly enough, I took an art course at Dartmouth one summer because Hannes Beckmann, which was the younger generation of the Bauhaus artists, was teaching at Dartmouth. I just thought that was so interesting. When he heard that I'd taken Albers' course he was just hoping so much I was an artist. I said "Well no, I'm sorry, I teach English, you know." But I still enjoyed his course very much. I can remember I made an enormous big thing by pasting paper on, you know, and making colors and things move. He was a great teacher, and he—I don't know why, but he was familiar with Albers and so their systems were a little bit alike, you know. But Albers was not the kind, like Olson, to visit with the students, you know, in between classes. He was, he worked away. He worked—I'm sure he was painting all the time. While I was at Black Mountain, at the end of the first semester, Albers left. The way it was set up, it seemed to me that the faculty decided things just sort of a majority vote or something, and if they disagreed, half of them left, you know. It must have happened again and again, and it was

a weakness of the school that they couldn't work it out in some way. But I'm sure it wasn't that, wasn't the only time that it happened. But I was sorry to see him go.

MEH: What other classes did you take?

MRT: Well, Olson's writing, a couple of drawing and color or painting from Albers, and Frank Rice's linguistics, and French from Madame, and then I did Chorus with Bimbus, and we did the St. Matthew's Passion and I thought it was beautiful.

MEH: Do you have particular memories of mealtimes at Black Mountain?

MRT: Oh, yes, the food was wonderful. We all took turns being waitresses and things, and—I can't remember doing a lot of work. I mean, it wasn't that much, you know, but we did try to help. I thought the cooks were great. At that age, food is important. You really like food.

MEH: Did you work on the Work Program? Did you have an assignment?
[OVERTALK]

MRT: Oh yes, I worked on the grounds crew and got a terrible case of poison ivy. One of the old maintenance men, Ben Sneed, who was very vulnerable to poison ivy—we had many a wonderful conversation about how terrible poison ivy was and how awful it was. He'd had systemic poison ivy at one point. But anyway, I still loved the work crew. That was more fun than—What we tried to do was to make a path along the lake between the Studies Building and the Dining Hall. Because there was the road and then down at the lake there was this old overgrown path, so we just thought that would be very nice to clear that and that's what we were trying to do.

MEH: Who else—Do you remember who else was on the grounds crew?

MRT: Bert Morgan was on that crew, and he was also a Marylander, so—I think after Bill gave up being head of the work crew, maybe Bert had even, even took that over. But we did other—sports too. We played touch football. We went swimming in the lake. That was great swimming. We hiked a lot. I can remember once we hiked up to the saddle that Bill talks about in his writing, and we had made waffles and we had pancakes, you know. We had maple syrup, but we forgot to bring any water. We look down and we see this gushing river, you know, half a mile below us, and it was just torture because we'd eaten all this sickly sweet pancake syrup, and we didn't have any water to drink. But hiking was a great thing there too, and just sitting around talking. Oh, they just sat around and talked all the time.

MEH: In the Studies Building?

MRT: In the Studies Building, usually. Sometimes—less likely to be in the dining room. Usually in our Studies Building.

MEH: How do you remember the Studies Building?

MRT: Well, my study was on the top floor. There were two floors, and the roadway from the Dining Hall came in on the top floor. Then below the bottom floor was open space, and it wasn't really used for much of anything but there were some very handsome murals under there done by some Mexican artist. But it was a long building, and it had a central hallway on each floor with little cubicles off of each, you know, off of each hallway.

MEH: But how would you describe the atmosphere of the Studies Building?

- MRT:** Well, it was where people lived most of their time there, you know. If you were in a visiting mood you sort of went to somebody's study where people were collecting, you know, or listening to music, and sat around and talked. If you wanted to study, you know, you could close the door and get your work done. So it was used both ways, you know. Then there were decks at each end, and the decks were just great for visiting and talking about things.
- MEH:** You give very short answers. What are other things that you discussed in your writing that we haven't talked about? Other topics?
- MRT:** Well, let's see. I talked about Albers' classes, I talked about Olson's classes, Frank Rice's classes, Madame.
- MEH:** Who are students that you particularly remember?
- MRT:** Well, Errisinola Ginesi was one of my, you know, roommates there.
- MEH:** Do you know what happened to her?
- MRT:** No, I would like to. She was a delightful friend. Roz, who married Dick Negro, I can't remember Roz's last name. Nick Cernovich, who was an art student there. Then—Those were the ones I palled around—Mel? What was Mel's last name? Bill might remember. She wasn't in our dorm, but—Misi and I palled around a lot. Bert Morgan, palled around with him a lot. Frank Eisendrath. Pete Heinemann was a student, an art student who was a very nice boy but he was—I often wonder how his art turned out because the paintings that he did were mostly these shrouded figures, you know. Instead of eyes they'd have sort of black holes. He started to paint—He asked if I would pose for him and do a portrait, so I did. He just could not paint my face. You know, I said I was this sort of buxom pink turtleneck there without a head. I mean he would try, "Oh I just can't get this." But that was very interesting. He just, just always was so morose. So morose. He was broke. Every time he would come into my study, well everybody would be totally out of cigarettes, totally out of cigarettes, so he would paw through the ashtray looking for a stub that was long enough to smoke, you know. Just so down in the mouth, and I always wonder what happened to him because I think he did have some skill, but—
- MEH:** I can tell you later. So are there other particular memories that you have of the college? Anecdotes? Things that happened while you were there—impressions?
- MRT:** Well, I can remember Gerda Slavson, who was—and then later I think she married Stan Cook. But Gerda was sort of a tomboy, and I can remember about every time she went past me she would just give me a fist in the upper arm or something. Finally, I just took a book I had and I just cracked her on top of the head as hard as I could. I went to her after, and I said, "Gerda, I'm really really sorry. I shouldn't have done it, but, you know, you really got to me." After that we were just wonderful friends. [LAUGHS] I really liked her. But I spent a lot of my time, you know, doing active things. I mean, I didn't spend all my time studying. I spent a lot of time swimming and hiking and, you know, going around. And did enjoy the work too, you know, but I can't say I spent all my time doing it.
- MEH:** Were they having Mush Day when you were at Black Mountain? The day when everybody—
- MRT:** No, they weren't. No, I didn't remember that at all.

MEH: You said you went hiking. Did you go into Black Mountain or Asheville very often?

MRT: I don't remem—We didn't go to Black Mountain very often. But we did go to Asheville once in awhile. Once Bill and Willie drove me over to the old location of Black Mountain, where it started, you know, in these church buildings. It was sort of deserted but we just looked around. Very handsome buildings, you know.

MEH: Why did you leave the college? You were there for one year? Did you stay through the summer of '49?

MRT: No, I didn't. I just stayed a year and left because that's when my money ran out. I would have either had to, you know, go back and get a job. In those days you didn't really think of borrowing large sums of money that much, you know. You'd just stop and work for awhile and then go. At least that's what I did when I went to Bridgewater. Bill and I were thinking of, you know, getting married about that time so I thought, oh well, that's maybe enough schooling for now. I thought I could work on my writing, and I did work on that some.

MEH: So, when you left, what did you do? You went home?

MRT: I went home and stayed there with my parents for awhile, and got married the next spring—April 1950.

MEH: Then he's talked a little bit about what you did since, but, you know, as a mother of five children, I'm sure you have a different perspective. So you, you lived on the family farm?

MRT: Yes. I did still keep trying to write. Bill and I thought—He would always type it for me, because he'd taken typing and he was a great editor, so it was sort of a joint effort. We did sell a couple articles to Parents magazine, and then I—When we started to teach, then I tried to write for the Independent School Bulletin, you know, and we had four or five articles published in that. But then when we were over here we really didn't have time to do it, and so after awhile we found it really worked better for Bill to stay and work on our house and farm and for me to be, you know, go out and be the money earner for awhile. So there wasn't much time to write, but actually in my job I used the writing skills a lot, so it worked out well.

MEH: So you went to—When you went to Vermont, to the Mountain School, he, Bill was saying that you went on then to get degrees.

MRT: Yes.

MEH: First?

MRT: Yes, I finished up my B.A. degree at Goddard, and then I got a M.A.L.S. degree—that's a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies—at Dartmouth. That—

MEH: At Goddard, they accepted your credits from Black Mountain?

MRT: They accepted all my Black Mountain credits. Wasn't that wonderful! No other college would have done that. But Goddard was very sympathetic to the Black Mountain idea. Also there was someone there in the administration—

MEH: Will Hamlin?

MRT: Will Hamlin, who had been at Black Mountain. So I think that that helped me too. But I did write—When I was trying to write, with Bill's help, we, I should say, I did write a story about Black Mountain and sent it, I think I sent it to the New Yorker and I sent it to the Atlantic Monthly and the New Yorker kept it a long time. I

thought, "Oh, does this mean anything?" You know, if they keep it a long time? But it didn't. It came back with a nice—

MEH: Rejection.

MRT: Yeah. Rejection.

MEH: So when you said you were to be the money earner, you mean to help support the farm venture, what did you do to earn money? Now you're talking about here—once you moved to New York.

MRT: Here. Oh yes, yes.

MEH: Did you teach in Vermont?

MRT: Yes I did. I taught English and French.

MEH: At—

MRT: At the Mountain School.

MEH: Okay. I was asking him if he was familiar with the Woodstock Country Day School. It's a private school in Woodstock, which was co-founded by a Black Mountain student, David Bailey.

MRT: Well, I think we did hear of it, but we never visited it.

MEH: Right. There was no communication between—

MRT: No.

MEH: Okay—The four of you. His wife was from Black Mountain, also. So you taught English at the Mountain School?

MRT: Yes.

MEH: Then when you came here, what did you do to work?

MRT: Then I worked at a hospital. Because we looked—and I even applied for a job at Keufa [PH] College and she said "Well it's a down time for us," she said. "We're even having to let some people go." But wrote a very nice letter. I could not have had a nicer rejection. So I was also very interested in food, and at the Mountain School it had a cooking activity as my evening activity for the whole time I was there. Maybe the seventh year I did—when we saw we were going to leave, I didn't do it, but for that, for six years, you know, I had this cooking activity, so it was something I was really interested in. I had been a 4-H leader when our children were young. So, I enjoyed working at the hospital, too. It was—Went back to school, took more—I had to take more classes to be a registered dietician. I had to take more science classes.

MEH: Okay. So you became a registered dietician, or a dietician at the hospital.

MRT: Yes.

MEH: Now you're a dietician at—

MRT: After about eight years of being a Food Service Director, I thought that that was about—I'd done about as much as you could do in that job—and so I quit but told them I'd be their consultant dietician, because if you don't have a dietician in your facility, like a nursing home, you just hire one to come a day or two a week, as much as you need them, you know. So after that I just became a consultant, and I had to travel around a lot but it was a much more interesting job. Because as a Food Service Director, you know, you would have a husband calling you up at five o'clock in the morning to tell you that you did not schedule his wife enough, or you would have the nurses calling to say you had to come in at one o'clock in the morning to mix up a home-made tube feeding because this doctor

did not want to use canned tube feedings, you know. So being a consultant dietician, you may have had more risks and everything, but then you could just work on the clinical part that was more interesting.

MEH: Right. Looking back at Black Mountain, two things. You were only there for a year, but it was a rather tumultuous year. It was the year that Dreier and Trude and the Alberses and Charlotte Schlesinger left, and there was a lot of conflict. But just from that year, what do you think—looking back—what do you think about the Black Mountain philosophy worked and did not work?

MRT: Well, I sort of felt in a way that I was different from many of the students there because I came from a farm, you know. I came from a religious background. To me they were all very entertaining—I must say. [LAUGHS] You know, I mean they were just so different. I think that was what made it so much fun is to see these people that just came from a totally different background, you know, and I just thought they were just a very—I don't know any other way to say it: they were just so darn funny sometimes and so entertaining, you know, and all just delightful and friendly. I can remember Jerry Levy, you know, just a quintessential New Yorker, his family had art galleries or something there you know, and he was just such a friendly, articulate boy, just lovable, you know, and there was the Sihvonens who were always very quiet. There was Julie Light, who was my roommate the second half of the year and just a real character but delightful. Si Sillman was there. He was a—I can remember something—Mel, I can't remember Mel's last name but she was a character. She would—Maybe it's just as well I can't, because I want to say something that maybe it's not—I mean, you know, I have to, you know, be careful maybe about what I say about other people. So anyway, but she would take sleeping pills and she would sleep for nineteen hours, and then she would take uppers, Benzedrine, and she would perk herself up, you know, and I just thought, "My gosh, why is she doing this to herself," you know, but we're certainly entertaining, I must say, to see people—And, you know, when I first tried alcohol and cigarettes there at Black Mountain—well, now I'd tried cigarettes before, I guess, at the other college, but anyway, really inhaled, you know—I thought oh, my goodness, tell me these people put themselves through this torture just so they can become addicted, you know. I mean it was not—I didn't really understand that mentality, but they were all—They drank a lot. The parties often involved alcohol. I can remember the Australians bragging, or something, that they had drunk like thirty cans of beer in one night and they'd line them up and down the hall, you know. But they were all just really friendly, good-natured people that—There weren't a lot of other drugs there that I knew about, but then if I didn't take them and have them, I wouldn't have known. But—So—I thought that the faculty wives were very nice and friendly. As I said, Mrs. Corkran, the one I wrote my story about, Mrs. Dreier at that time, you know, she did not come down very often but she was there, very friendly. We read a lot of books on the side. We read—Olson did not necessarily assign a lot of books. I can remember at the time I read an eleven hundred page tome of Melville's called Pierre, and started Moby Dick but never did finish Moby Dick, unfortunately. And read a lot of his short novels. Olson liked Melville. I guess I liked Melville. I guess he's not my favorite, but I do. He

also liked Hemingway. I can't say that—It was sort of the Hemingway period then though, wasn't it? But we did do a certain amount of traveling around Black Mountain. At first we would go out to a pub there called Peek's, and I can remember that the Australians would like to heat the poker red hot in the fireplace and then stick the poker in their beer. But after awhile the tavern owner decided that he didn't want them doing that, so they didn't. But it was a great contrast from my previous college, because at the previous college if you were not in your dormitory, your girls' dormitory, by nine o'clock at night, you were locked out. The matron would have to come and let you in and you would be campused for three days. I know, because I tried it once. My boyfriend at the time, we just decided to see what would happen if you did this. At Black Mountain, nobody cared.

MEH: So do you think that was good or bad?

MRT: Well it was great! I loved it. But I heard that the last semester there was a young girl who came to visit with her parents and we talked to them and the parents visited with me, you know, and I tried to tell them what I thought were the advantages and disadvantages, and I kept a correspondence with Bert Morgan, the other Marylander, for a couple of years after I left, and he said that she had had an emotional breakdown and had ended up being institutionalized or something. I thought "Well, was it Black Mountain, or was it just that she was a girl ready to have an emotional breakdown and—?" But I guess I think that you would enjoy Black Mountain a lot more if you had something that you wanted to do, and if you had another year of college behind you I think it would have been better. But most everybody did, within that—You know. But the idea that, of having this close-knit college, where the teachers, you know, lived with the students and knew them between classes and they ate together and played together with their Saturday night parties, I mean, most of the teachers really bought into that in a wonderful way. I think that it really, really worked. I mean as I say, I—Bill laughs at me because I said I was happy every minute of Black Mountain. I just thought it was more fun than anything. I thought that I learned so much. I mean when I was graduating from Goddard, you had to choose—a whole semester, your last semester you chose one subject and you had to write a thesis to leave. I chose teaching English because that's what I wanted to do and was doing. I thought of all the books that I read on teaching for that semester course and writing the thesis, I really learned so much that I thought was good about teaching from Olson and Frank Rice and Albers, you know. I thought that they were good teachers. I must tell you something funny, though, about Bimbus. We were singing the St. Matthew Passion, this beautiful Bach chorale. There's one that goes, a very solemn chant where you say, the whole chorus goes "Crucifixus, crucifixus," and all at once Bimbus leaps up from the piano, takes a stainless steel dish used as an ashtray, and throws it at somebody in the chorus. It turned out she was throwing it at a guy who was doing something that she didn't want him to do. I don't know whether it was a musical thing or whether he was pinching somebody or what. But she hit Bert Morgan, and so they both quit. [LAUGHS] But you had to say even that was sort

of entertaining. Oh! But she just did a beautiful job and she, you know, worked with what she had, and I thought we sounded pretty good.

MEH: Did you sing this for the college?

MRT: We just sang it for the college, yes.

MEH: That wasn't one of the things that you took to a local church or whatever to sing?

MRT: Not the year I was there we didn't.

MEH: So how did—what influence do you think the college had in terms of your teaching later?

MRT: Very much.

MEH: How's that.

MRT: I would say that in teaching English I did just what Olson did. I asked my students to really write a lot. In other words, one of the things that you learned in those days from reading these books about teaching is that you don't—the student doesn't learn from what you do. The student learns from what he or she does. So I realized that that's just what they were doing. They were making the students work. Then they were getting those students lots of feedback. Both Albers and Olson, in the writing and the art. You had to do the work, and then you got feedback from the teacher. I just used that method in my English classes I thought to good effect. I can remember sometimes it would be just amazing the way you would see a student, you know, blossom in their writing, because they had to put words to paper, you know. I guess you—because you certainly can't do anything until you actually get those words on paper. That's the start. You have to—Of course, I thought Goddard was—the Goddard teachers were good too, and I think they had some of the philosophies of Black Mountain, too.

MEH: Yeah, I think that's true. Before we stop for now, are there any other particular memories or observations that you have about the college?

MRT: Well, there are other faculty members that really—Like Herr Bodky. Although I took no music lessons, I was not musical. You know, I mean I sang in chorus just because I love music, you know. But anyway, he was so generous in giving of his time to play. He played almost every Saturday night and he was marvelous. Not only that, but when Julie Light and I, like we found a mouse. That Julie went into orbit. "Ooooh," you know. He came over—the heroic man coming over, you know, taking this mouse out of the trap or whatever he had to do. I mean everybody was just so nice at Black Mountain. It was just—For instance, now maybe Bill told you about this, but this is something that he helped do. Natasha, his mentor—as he says he spent his life at Black Mountain with Natasha. There was a young woman there who had had polio or something and she just traveled in a wheelchair. She was a photographer—Hazel—I'm sure you remember the name.

MEH: Hazel Larsen.

MRT: Hazel Larsen, very famous. Natasha wanted her to learn to walk, and she encouraged her and they would just take a hand and she really did learn to walk. I don't think she kept it up. I don't think she had the confidence, you know, to keep it up, but I just thought that was an instance of the caring for each other.

They certainly did have arguments. I can remember once I did something that was really not very nice, but Mel came to me and she said, "Martha, somebody took my English book." She said, "Donald Droll has a book and he did not have one." I said, "Let's go see." So we did something terribly illegal. We went into his study, opened the book, ripped his nametag off and there was her name written under it. His friends—I can remember Si Sillman said, "That was a terrible thing that you did!" I said, "Well, he stole the book and put his name in it. That was pretty terrible too, wasn't it?" You know, and we sort of had to let it go at that, you know, because—[LAUGHS] There were arguments once in awhile. I can remember—The boys decided to make a raid on the girls' dorm and so we woke up one night, the lights coming on and all the room full of boys. So, then we decided, "Well, let's do that to them!" You know. So some of us did that to them. Pretty frivolous stuff, wasn't it? [LAUGHS]

MEH: At the time.

MRT: Old students were always coming back to visit. I can remember one old student gave a lot of money so that there could be eggnog at the Christmas party. I thought, "Is that really the wisest way to take and spend a couple hundred dollars?—on eggnog?" [LAUGHS] Bill certainly did a lot. I heard about him even before I met him. "Oh, Bill Treichler. He cleaned up the place, he made it look nice." When they had a flood, they had to call Bill Treichler. He was the one who was supposed to save the cooks, who were on the other side of the water.

MEH: So you decided this was an interesting guy.

MRT: Yes. Yeah. I suppose our—He was very interested in his organics, you know—But we did get in a little argument once. He said, you know, something about money, and it's not easy going to college, you know, on your skimpy allowance, that you have on your—the allowance that the army allowed you to go back to school. I said, "Well, it's not easy without it either."

MEH: He learned that [OVERTALK]

MRT: I felt that they deserved it. I wasn't complaining at all. Oh, well, I feel I'm not doing it justice because there was just a lot—

MEH: [OVERTALK] He was talking about the people who would accompany you when you went on walks trying to court, like John Corkran.

MRT: Oh, John Corkran and Frank Eisendrath and Bert Morgan. Yes. I can remember once, with Frank, he took us on—or Bill and I were just walking around the countryside and we happened to go past the dump and they had great big pipes, you know, going across the ground. I have no idea what they were. But we decided that this was the way to travel was to walk on the pipes. Frank would pretend that he could not walk that pipe. I mean, the thing was this big, you know, and pretend that he was falling off and just putting on a show for us, you know. But it was beautiful country. We walked up the mountains and around. I can remember Eini—Eini Sihvonen was a gung ho hiker, and she took us on a hike once. I can't remember who else was there. I think Eric Renner, Ronald Jackson, can't remember who else. Eini was giving us a workout, and I made up my mind that I would die before I asked them to stop and rest, and I just about did, I'll tell you. Fortunately, finally she said, "Now we can take a rest." But some of them were really—I can remember we did things that were really sort of dangerous. I

can remember when they had the flood, the river was just out of its banks, and we decided to go wading in the river. You know it was just incredibly dangerous, and our bodies would have probably been found five miles down. But we did, and it was just an awful lot of fun but incredibly dangerous.

MEH: I don't remember hearing about this particular flood.

MRT: Well, it was the one—Hmm, I think it was the first semester. I think it was the first semester in the fall. And—

MEH: Did the lake—I mean did the college property flood, or was it the lower area?

MRT: It was the river, I think, that sort of led into the lake but it didn't actually flood the upper part where the Studies Building were [SIC] or even the Dining Hall. But where the cooks lived, that's where it flooded, and they were sort of isolated, you know.

MEH: Where did the cooks live at that point?

MRT: Well, when you went in the gate, you sort of turned left instead of, you know, going straight ahead to the Dining Hall on the right. The Music House I think was also in that direction.

MEH: Was it one of the barrack type buildings? Or was it a separate house?

MRT: I never saw it. I never saw it. I wasn't there to help rescue the cooks.

MEH: They had to be rescued?

MRT: But Bill and I did go do—We did use the Minimum House a lot, to do courting. It was a beautiful little house. We'd take—instead of sitting outside, well, we could go and use the Minimum House and have our Sunday night supper. Everybody had—

MEH: Right. Nobody was living in it then?

MRT: No, no. It was just sort of there. Nobody was living in it. It was for people to use. Oh, the gardening. We did help garden. I was going to mention Ruth Asawa because she taught us so much. But everybody would pitch in and do hay bales and, you know, when it was time to make hay. Everybody would plant onions or plant things.

MEH: How do you remember Ruth? What was she like?

MRT: Well physically she was a lot shorter than I was, and just had beautiful glossy black hair and just a very sweet smile and beautiful teeth. She just was so—Her art, you know, was so beautiful and detailed, you know. Albers loved her work. He loved Ruth's work. But—I should have paid more attention, shouldn't I, but she was just such a nice person, such a—friendly to everyone, and I would like to know, it would be interesting to know what happened to her too. But I think she continued on with her art, too.

MEH: I can tell you later. We can have a "What did they do?" session.

MRT: Yes. That's great.

MEH: Okay, maybe—Go ahead—Madame and her gossiping.

MRT: At the time, the rumor was that Ted Dreier was having an affair with Trude Guernonprez, and I know I would pass them going off for a hike up the mountain by themselves or whatever. Madame told the story of once Mrs. Dreier attacking Trude physically, and that they had just a catfight, you know. Of course, this is the kind of thing that I would not have known if Madame hadn't been willing to gossip a little bit. She—Other things, she would just tell it all. I just thought that was a lot

of fun. In French, of course. But one of the funniest times was—One of the students that she threw out was David Hochstein. David was just a friendly guy. You could not dislike the guy. He was from New York. I can remember Uli Heinemann-Rufer was a German young man. He was older than the rest of us, some, and he'd done newspaper cartooning. He was really sort of a worldly person to come into these young college students, but we just all loved Uli. You couldn't dislike him. He wrote a play. I can remember that he taught Misi—Errisinola Ginesi was called "Misi"—he taught Misi and me the Charleston, and he made us do the Charleston in this play. It has some outrageous song that we sang, you know. He himself did Albers—put on the little wire-rimmed glasses and "Ach so! He comes, he comes," you know, and we just all laughed so hard. But he and Albers did have their differences too. They argued.

MEH: What did they argue about?

MRT: They were arguing about art, in art class. This was in class. They would really raise their voices. I can remember that in drawing class he was trying—Albers was teaching us the concept of what he called "Duchtus" [PH], and that is "continuity." I had been writing things that he had been saying, whether it was outrageous or not, on the corner of my paper, you know like this. He looked down and he said, "Now that has Duchtus!" I thought, "Oh my gosh, he's going to read it." But he didn't read it. He might not have cared anyway, you know [LAUGHS] but I thought that was pretty funny. "Oh, that has Duchtus!" So—I got sidetracked. What were we talking about? Oh, Madame and her gossiping? So that was fun. Natasha would go through the Stu—, you know, to go out, and she always asked Natasha "Where are you going?" "Where are you going?" I thought that was—Madame just kept tabs of everyone. When they came to visit us, when Eric Renner and Natasha were married and they stopped to visit us in Iowa, our children played cards with Madame. They said that after they had gotten through, Madame said, "How much do I owe you?" But afterwards, Madame psychoanalyzed our children. Amazing! Amazing! She was just—"Now he is like this," you know, "he's like this." So she was just—I can remember that we gave them our bedroom and we camped in our children's bunk room. But, of course, we left the crib there because, you know—Madame was going to sleep in one of our children's rooms in the bunk room, too. We had this all laid out. Madame took a look at that and said, "I don't think that's big enough for me." [LAUGHS] We thought this was such an entertaining person, who could psychoanalyze your children just for playing cards with them and, you know, tell you what their personalities were, on the mark, and then think we were going to ask her to sleep in a crib! But I can remember that the very day that Madame and Natasha and Eric were there, we got an acceptance from Parents magazine, earning two hundred dollars, which to us was big bucks at the time. That was fun. It was interesting. But there were certain faculty members who I did not have much to do with, and Mrs. Jalowetz was one. Bill was a very close friend of Mrs. Jalowetz, but it just happened that I didn't have any musical classes and so I didn't really have much to do with her but she seemed like a very friendly, nice person always—But who are we forgetting?

MEH: You know what we can do is [OVERTALK]

MRT: —accounting, and we read Shakespeare. We went to Mrs. Rice's house and we read Shakespeare aloud. For him.

MEH: I can't think of his name right now, but I know who you're talking about.

MRT: Yes, very nice gentlemanly gentleman. But now this I can remember is another funny thing once. There was a couple in their studies—the studies were occasionally used for sexual activities, I am sure, of course. I can remember one student looking for a condom. Going up and down the hall, you know. To me, I mean this is a little bit shocking, but, as I said, entertaining, right? Going up and down the halls trying to find—[LAUGHS] In one of my recollections, I remember something else. Bob Rauschenberg had a sewing machine, which he would lend to students, and I said "Bob, you really should charge for this. You're using up your machine." He said, "Well, I didn't think of it but, well, what do you think?" I said, "Well, twenty-five cents an hour or something like that?" He said, "Well, okay." So I put a zipper in a dress using his sewing machine, and I hurried so fast, trying to save money, that I got the zipper in backwards, and he never let me forget putting that zipper in backwards [LAUGHS].

MEH: What was Bob Rauschenberg like?

MRT: Well, he was a very lovable guy. He was—he was handsome. He was friendly. He was articulate. I'd say that he was really a plus for the college. Susan, his girlfriend, was very quiet. She had had polio and so was a little handicapped, but—Maybe, I think that's why she was, maybe she—

MEH: She had been in an accident. She had been burned badly.

MRT: Oh that's what it was. Okay. But anyway, they worked hard. They painted a lot. I can remember once we went to Asheville in the evening. It must have been to a movie or something. I happened to sit up front with Bob, and we were visiting and talking and afterwards Susan asked me, "Oh, what were you all, what were you talking about," you know. I tried to tell her, and it made me realize that she wasn't—I felt, oh, she's not as secure in this relationship as I thought she was, you know. So, I was interested that they did get married, they did have a child, later. I don't really like his goat with a But oh, he was just a, he was just a great guy. I don't like his goat with a tire around it, at all. I mean I think he's pulling somebody's leg. I think he could have done better. But his idea that whatever you want to call art can be art—I don't know whether I—Certainly art is different for other people. I mean I followed his career with interest, and I'm sure Bill did too. But he wasn't doing that kind of work at Black Mountain, so I was interested that he went in that direction later.

[END OF RECORDING TAPE 1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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