

Interviewee: WILLIAM TREICHLER
 Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. Bill, how did you come to be at Black Mountain?
WT: Well, it was probably my mother's fault. She read a book about schools and Black Mountain was one of them, and she thought that might be a place I'd like to go.
MEH: Where did you grow up?
WT: In Iowa, on a farm north of—Well, I was actually born in Cedar Rapids, and when I was four years old my parents moved to this farm at Troy Mills, which is twenty-four miles north of Cedar Rapids.
MEH: You, did you go from high school—You said you were in the service. Did you go from high school into service?
WT: Well, I did go to a three-month course in engineering at Iowa State College. It was one of these war training courses. They were training you to be an inspector or something like that. I worked for about half a year for the Corps of Engineers [at Rock Island, Illinois. I lived in] Davenport, Iowa. Then I was drafted, February '43, I think. I went into the service in September.
MEH: So after the war, you were out of service. You didn't go directly to Black Mountain.
WT: No. I went back to [Ames, Iowa State College], to college for one term, and then I went to Black Mountain, but it was some time—there could have been a year in there that—
MEH: It seems sort of curious to me that your mother, you know, on a farm in Iowa, would be encouraging her son to go to Black Mountain. What type of woman was she? What would have interested her about Black Mountain?
WT: It was in a book written by Milton Wend and it was How to Live in the Country Without Farming, and he recommended Bennington and Berea and Black Mountain. I think he may have recommended Sarah Lawrence. Several other schools, but I don't remember. But Black Mountain caught my mother's eye. Then it did have quite a bit of publicity. I think it was written up in the magazines and so on, but she had to do something to get her son going.
 [LAUGHS]
MEH: Do you remember anything about the application process in particular?
WT: No, I don't remember anything about that.
MEH: Do you remember how you traveled first to Black Mountain?
WT: We drove—my parents drove me down there. In our car, yeah.

- MEH:** All the way from Iowa.
- WT:** All the way from Iowa, yes.
- MEH:** Did you have any idea what to expect?
- WT:** Well, I was terribly disappointed when I arrived, because this school was grown up with weeds and long grass and so on, and I was dismayed. I remember the first night when we stayed in the guest room up above the office in the Office Building, and I was—"I'm not going to stay here. Let's go home. No, not at all." My parents—they took it much better than I did and they said "Oh, it's all right." My mother said, "Well you can do something about cleaning up if that's what's bothering you," you know. So they sort of talked me into it. I did stay, of course, and then a little later I got acquainted with Ray Trayer, who was the farmer, and he let me use the farm mower and so on, so I started cutting weeds and so on. First along the entrance, which shocked me so much when we arrived, and then around the Studies Building, down below by the Library and the other buildings. Mrs. Rice, who was the librarian, she greatly approved of cutting the weeds. Some of the students didn't think they wanted them cut, but—So that's sort of how I got started—that way.
- MEH:** Right. So you really sort of immediately were drawn to the Work Program and cleaning the place up a bit?
- WT:** Yes. I wanted—Well, I enrolled in the chemistry class, and I was very fortunate that way because Natasha Goldowski was the new teacher. She had come down—I think it was her first year too. I told her that I—Oh, I should back up a little bit to say that our family had gotten very interested in organic farming and I wanted to know more about that and to really understand why organic farming would be superior to chemical farming and so on, so I wanted to get a background in biochemistry. I told Natasha what I wanted to do, and she said, "Well, we can do that if you're willing to work to do it. But there will be a lot of work to it, and so on." So we started out in chemistry, and of course it had to be very basic. I hadn't had chemistry before, not in high school or anything, and she—It was all tutorial, and so I spent most of my academic work with Natasha there. Well, we went through basic chemistry and organic chemistry and were getting into biochemistry and so on. She was a marvelous teacher.
- MEH:** Was this done like a tutorial, the entire thing?
- WT:** We—She did have classes, and we did meet—There was a laboratory there too, and we worked there and stuff. But most of it was classwork. But she had an office also. The Goldowskis lived in the back side of the Office Building—they had an apartment there, and she had her office there, so we often met in her office and it was tutorial, yeah.
- MEH:** It's really amazing to think that you could go to college as a freshman and have basically your classes as tutorials.
- WT:** It was marvelous. Yes, it was. Very unusual.
- MEH:** So—lost the question that was on my mind. So you were studying the sciences, chemistry, biology.
- WT:** Yes.
- MEH:** What was—There was something related to her teaching. What was it? It'll come to me again. What was Natasha Goldowski like?

WT: Well, she was a warm-hearted person, and she had come over to this country to work on the Manhattan Project, and she was a corrosion expert. That had been her work in France. She was raised in—born in Russia, in Moscow, and as a young girl she had gone to Paris to study. I remember she told us one time “I have a degree. I have a doctorate in Chemistry and Physics and an engineering degree. I never went a day to college at the University of Paris.” She said, “I couldn’t afford to. I had to work all day.” Her mother came shortly after she arrived to take care of Natasha, of course, so she had two to support that way. So she worked at a job and bought notes, because there were people who took notes at the lectures and sold those notes every day. She subscribed to the notes, studied the notes, passed the examinations, got the degrees, and so on. So it was quite a story to do that. Oh then, then later she specialized in corrosion, you know, metals and so on, and she worked for the French Air Ministry and so on. She could tell us great stories about corrosion effects and so on. Oh she was a very enthusiastic, exuberant person, and interested in what was going on, and keeping up. She had been to Princeton. She knew all the big names in physics and so on and was very opinionated and expressed her ideas of the personalities of physicists and so on. So, yeah, it was a treat. Well, I should also say—One of my reasons to go to Black Mountain was that I was also very interested in homestead living, living in the country in self-sufficiency. We had met Ralph Borsodi, who was the great decentralist here, and going to decentralist conferences and so on. I wanted to be as self-sufficient as could be. A man had come to one of these conferences with a homespun suit. It was a handsome-looking suit that he or his wife had made for himself. This just impressed me so much that I said, “Well, I’d like to learn how to weave.” So the weaving courses at Black Mountain were an attraction in that—I didn’t go there knowing that I would find the chemistry, but I went there expecting to learn how to weave, and I did take Trude’s weaving course.

MEH: Judy—?

WT: Trude Guermonprez. Anni Albers was there too, but I don’t think she was there that first time. They came at midyear. But Trude was there with her mother, Mrs. Jalowetz. So we—Every person was assigned a loom so you had your own loom to work on and you could experiment, do what you wanted. But she did have classes and taught us the different weaves and how to diagram the weaves and so on. We did go on great trips to see weaving mills and like that. They were more interested in art weaving at Black Mountain than the other, but I learned to weave. But I haven’t done it since [LAUGHS] [UNINTELL].

MEH: But the question I was going to ask you referred to where you had your classes. When you went the first year, ’47-’48, if I’m correct, the science classes were in what had been the old bathhouse.

WT: Yeah, right.

MEH: With the photography studio, darkrooms. Then that burned.

WT: That burned the second year.

MEH: So then where did she hold classes after that?

WT: Usually in her, either in her office or—We had a few classes—well I don’t think they really were classes—up at the Minimum House. I don’t think we had

classes. We'd sort of have a party up there or something like that with the class. Maybe we had—She was always setting up another class. "Well," you know, "I see you're not well-grounded in physics and physics really is the mother of chemistry, so we have to have a physics class." She was always more the physicist than the chemist, although that had been her own specialty. So she'd set up a chemistry—"Well you're really pretty good in arithmetic. I'm amazed that you can do some of these things in arithmetic when it's so much easier to do it with algebra. We need to have a mathematics class." So, Natasha was always adding on something new, which was wonderful, you know, and so we did those things. There were other people in the classes too, but I got a lot of special attention and they could have too, and so on.

MEH: Who were some of the other people taking science at that time?

WT: All right, the first year it was Harry Noland, who was the brother of Ken Noland, and Harry's wife was—

MEH: Christa.

WT: Yeah. She was the school nurse, and I think they had a baby, and they lived in an apartment at the end of the boys' dormitory. Harry had been a student—This was his second year, at least, I can't remember the man right now, Dr.—, the man who developed the carbothermic—

MEH: Dr. Hansgirg.

WT: Hansgirg, right. Hansgirg had just left, and Harry thought Hansgirg was so wonderful, he was—I think he was a little let down when there was Natasha and so on—but he was a student the first year. There was another boy, Alex, and Alex I can't remember his name. I think it was a Russian name.

MEH: Kemeny. Alex Kemeny?

WT: That doesn't sound quite right, but it might have been. Anyway, Alex, he killed himself. He jumped off a bridge or something in New York, and this upset Natasha terribly. She, she felt guilty that she hadn't helped him more. Well, there was nothing—He was a happy-go-lucky guy, I remember. We used to go to the Veterans Hospital at Oteen and sell blood, because they were buying blood so you—Alex would joke about, wondered if they knew they were really buying alcohol from him, because he was spending it all, quite a bit of it, you know. But he was a character. It was tragic and all that, but it didn't happen there. But it upset Natasha terribly which—she did worry about people. She was always trying to [help people]. I can tell you some other stories off camera. [LAUGHS] But oh, then I also took a course from Max Dehn. He had Geometry for Artists, and it was a very interesting and we learned a lot of things, and I enjoyed it a lot too. He taught us different geometric relationships and so on and could diagram it on the board, and told us a lot of, oh, like the prime numbers—he told us "There are 25 prime numbers between 1 and 100, now why don't you see how many more you can find above a hundred. Well, you know there are certain savants who can just pick them off out like that, but we didn't get very far. But I remember I came back and I said "Well, I found—," I don't know, ten or fifteen, how many, I found a few. Then I said, "Oh I sort of had a method." "Oh you have a method!" I mean, he was just [incredulous]. But he was serious, you know, this kid was going to come up with a method when mathematicians had been wracking their brains forever and haven't yet

found—"There's no reason to it, I guess," I said, "Oh well, I just noticed that there was a certain interval between these primes and I'm guessing that it's getting farther all the time, you know, so look ahead, you know, and test them out and the ones that look like—Well, you aren't going to test any twos. So they're all eliminated." Well, it was a fun class. We had—Peter Nemenyi was in that class, and he was—Peter had a beard and moustache at first and looked quite a bit older. When he shaved off his beard, I was just—Well, he's just a kid, because he was younger than I, because I was through the army and so on like that. But Peter was a very smart boy, and especially in mathematics and so on. Even his father came down one time. There were a lot of people, art students as well as the other students who were in Max Dehn's class.

[INTERRUPTION]

MEH: So we had been talking about Natasha. How do you remember Natasha's mother—Madame?

WT: Oh, well, she was always taking care of Natasha, and whenever Natasha would come out of her office, which was—or her study, which was behind the living room where Madame held forth with her French students—she had more students, I believe, than any other teacher there, and everyone—Well, she was always working on me. "Well, now you haven't taken any French from me, and you need to know French, and you could learn French very easily, and I will teach you." Always imploring me to come and take French. Martha was one of her students. "Well, yes, I guess I could, I should," but I always put it off and so on. But Natasha would be coming out [of her office] and Madame would say "Where are you going?"—in French, all in French, I couldn't understand. She was always questioning Natasha where she was going, where she would be, and so on. They had a little dog that they called [Tomi, from Thomas], and she was talking to the dog and commanding the dog around too. But Madame was a very interesting person too, and we've written down some of the stories about—She told us that when she was a girl, she had gone to functions in the Kremlin and what it was like there, in the ballroom, and she said, "Now doors are very low and everyone has to stoop to go into the ballroom." The reason for this was so that one or two armed men could defend it, because anyone trying to invade would have to stoop down to come into the room so it was easy to defend the portions of the palace that way. I think that the Goldowskis had had some position in Moscow. Natasha's brother was a physician, a doctor, medical doctor, and he stayed there. He didn't come. But Natasha told another story about when she was a little girl, probably sixteen or seventeen, and she had gone up to the Commissar to get a larger coal ration or something like that, and she had strode into this magnificent room, which was so long and [there] was the desk at the far end. But she walked right—I know she could have done it, of course—walked right up to him and stated her purpose and got the coal, got what they needed and so on. But then I don't know whether they spoke—Yeah, they must have. This Alex, she spoke Russian to Alex, I remember now, so maybe he was from Russia. But French was more her, their, language. I understand that many Russians did speak French. Natasha said that they had relatives—cousins—who lived on the island in Paris, Ile de Cite, or whatever it is, and who—they had a very

expensive apartment there [from what Natasha said.] Then the music critic, [Boris?] Goldowski, was a cousin too, in this country. Can't think of his name right now. But the Goldowskis had been well connected.

MEH: So at Black Mountain, where did you live?

WT: I lived in the boys' dormitory, upstairs, and it was just a big room with cots around. There was one small room, and that's where Jim Tite lived. Jim had been there for awhile, so he had gotten a hold of this room and kept—and he stayed there. But Willie Joseph was nearby, and Paul Williams, and a lot of—They were the ones who were closest to where my bed was, so I can remember them, but there were others in there too. I don't know whether some were in rooms downstairs or not, but this was like a dormitory, like a barracks, and I sort of wonder how the Lake Eden Resort operated, if they just had these open bedrooms—who came there?

MEH: We can talk—I can tell you a little bit about that later. So you had a study though in the Studies Building? Or in one of the barracks.

WT: [OVERTALK]I had one in the "I" building. That was the one that closest to the Studies Building, but below. It had been a surplus building. I was there for the first year, but I didn't use that study very much really. Well, I worked there, studied there some.

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

WT: Oh, yes. In the first place, Black Mountain had wonderful food, probably better food than most other colleges. Well, when I was appointed to be in charge of the Work Program, I had to make out lists for the dish crews and so on, like that. I often ate in the kitchen—that was one of the perks sort of. There was a table there by the dishwasher. But then I helped out, you know, if someone was missing and oftentimes someone wouldn't show, so—Willie Joseph liked to eat in the kitchen too, and there were a few others, and so we—Oh, the evening meal was supposed to be dress up, and you put on a tie, a coat and a jacket, and we [occasionally] did that too. The [dress up dinner was Saturday night], and sometimes there would be a performance of some kind, or some visitor would play, but otherwise, Professor Erwin Bodky, who was a harpsichordist, played waltzes all night long [not really all night long, maybe 11:00 p.m.], and he was marvelous. You couldn't resist his playing. He would put such verve into it. It would go on for hours, and he was perspiring like mad. He was a very stocky, short man, but he was really working on that piano. He was pounding, and marvelous that was.

MEH: Now he was playing these waltzes for dancing?

WT: For dancing, just for dancing, and the students and the faculty danced. Ted Dreier was one of the spectacular waltzers, and he could take his partner and dash across the floor. Ted Junior was a good waltzer too. Some people have it and some don't, and—Martha and I say we always remember Donald Alter and Misi Ginesi, who was a close friend of hers, and they were just made for each other as far as dancing. They just danced—they were fascinating to watch and not interested in each other otherwise at all. But at least they knew to get together and dance. Don Alter was a nice boy. He always reminded me of—well I'm running on.

MEH: Go ahead. Run on.

WT: Well, he was a typical Berliner. I don't think he came from Berlin at all, but he—there's just something, oh, he's from Berlin, you know, but he wasn't very big and so on, but very neat.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: So you—Did you take any courses in literature or in—

WT: No, I didn't take any at all. I—Mrs. Corkran—Dave Corkran taught history courses, and Mrs. Corkran always had an introductory dinner for all the new students and invited them to her house and was always so nice. I think she was particularly nice to me. I don't know. The Corkrans had taught at the North Shore Country Day School out of Chicago, so they were sort of Midwestern and they liked me maybe because, but they—Mrs. Corkran was so nice and I remember visiting with her, going up there and so on. So I should have taken a history course from Dave, and history had been one of my favorite subjects when I was in school, but I wasn't interested in history then and I had these other opportunities so I didn't take it—But I stayed on good terms with the Corkrans, and they took me on a marvelous trip to Roan Mountain, [North Carolina] with their boys and it was an overnight trip and we walked all over the mountain. You know the Corkrans were wonderful. The Rondthalers who lived with them in the same house, well, I mean houses were divided. They took me on trips too. I got to know the Rondthalers quite [well], especially Mrs. Rondy, who was the office manager and oversaw the kitchen and all those things. I suppose through the Work Program. Then when my sister came down, she worked for Mrs. Rondy, so we knew them well. They took me on one or two trips. Howard was about my age. We went on one trip on the Appalachian Trail. We went over to the Smoky Mountains National Park. [The Rondthalers] were wonderful to the students too. Oh, just recently, when the hurricanes were in season, I heard—they were talking about Ocracoke Island, which is where they had their house, the only two-story house on the island they said. There was a mention of Howard's Pub, and I thought "That has to be Howard Rondthaler," because he loved—he talked of Ocracoke always.

MEH: Right, but he settled on the West Coast, so I doubt it. I think the family still owns the house.

WT: Really. Where's Bobby?

MEH: So the first year you were just a student, and the second year you were working with the farm, or directing the Work Program or something to that effect?

WT: I was what they call the Work Coordinator, from, for the first year too. It was shortly after I arrived there. I guess that it was an outgrowth of cutting the weeds, I don't know, but one night I was studying in one of the student classrooms in the Studies Building and Mim Sihvonen came in and said, "Well did you hear, could you hear that?"—because they were having a faculty meeting in an adjoining room. "Oh what are you talking about?" She said, "Well, you're just—you're the Work Coordinator now." She had been the Work Coordinator.

MEH: So what was your job as Work Coordinator?

WT: To make up the crew lists for the dishwashing, for the outside afternoon activities, and special things like the coal hauling. Every year they got in a

gondola car of coal. It would be on a siding down in Black Mountain, and we would—I think they must have hired some trucker who would park his truck alongside this car and we would go down and unload it into the truck. Well, the only way to unload it was to pick up each piece of coal and throw it over the side into the truck. After you got down to the bottom then you could use a shovel, but the coal was big pieces and small pieces. The [trucker] hauled it up to the school and dumped it alongside the Studies Building and in a bin by the kitchen. So people—Ted Dreier and Rondy, they were always very enthusiastic about the Work Program. They always threw themselves into it—washed dishes in the kitchen when it was their turn. Supposedly everyone was on the work crew list. Getting the coal up was a special effort and they certainly took their turn at that. Now there might have been a couple of the younger [teachers]—Frank Rice and others might have helped too. But there was a different attitude between the Europeans and the Americans about doing manual work, so—

MEH: What was the difference?

WT: The Europeans did not like—They just could not do manual work. It was demeaning. As Madame would say to me, knowing that I came from a farm and that I was working over at the college farm, she would say “Work with ze clods, become like ze clods.” That was an ingrained attitude that they—they couldn’t overcome. [Martha and Bert Morgan and others got Natasha to come one afternoon and work with them.] “Just come out and help us one afternoon.” They said that by the time they were through she was like a little girl, she was so excited about what they were doing and so on that it really had exhilarated her. Well I can see that Natasha could throw herself into doing things like that, but generally, no. It’s demeaning to do physical work. It’s too bad. But it was pretty evident at Black Mountain.

MEH: Did most of the students take part willingly, or—?

WT: Yes, I think a lot of them came there [because they were interested in the work program.] This was a big talking point about the school, their work program: everyone was involved in the school and everyone does work and helps out and so on. But there were students who would avoid it if they could. There were the students who got themselves special jobs, you know. They did certain work in the office or something like that. They’d figured out a niche for themselves, and I didn’t bother with them because well, why—I just ignored that and they took care of themselves. They weren’t on the list.

MEH: What sorts of jobs were there to be done for the Work Program?

WT: Well, clearing paths and it seems to me that we scrubbed the dining room floor, because I remember that Betty Jennerjahn had her dance classes in the dining room, and we wanted to put oil on the floor, paraffin oil, which they used to use in all the old schoolhouses. It’s a cheap floor finish. If you put paraffin oil on every day. You finally get a sheen. Well, I can understand, Betty didn’t want that because it was going to be on their feet. It would have taken a long time to have gotten a sheen. So we didn’t put any oil in the, on the dining room floor. So that makes me think that we were scrubbing that floor. There were other jobs like that. Oh, there was the coal hauling job, because I think [students hauled] they coal with the school’s weapons carrier. It was like a pickup truck.

Robin Wronowska, have you heard of her? She was there the second year. Robin took over the truck and possessed it and always drove it, so she hauled the coal. A crew would help her load up the truck, and then I guess they took it up to faculty houses for the boilers there.

MEH: Right. Did you make the work assignments for the farm, or did Ray Trayer do that?

WT: He must have done that. Yeah, I think there was a farm crew. Right, there was. Well, I may have made up the lists. You could be on the [crew you preferred]. Everyone was supposed to be on the kitchen crew, on the dishwashing crew, but the others I think you could choose which ones you wanted, and you're right, I forgot all about that. So maybe I helped only in saying "Well which, where do you want to be?" But Ray managed it over there.

MEH: So there was only one farmer at that point, Ray Trayer?

WT: No, there was—Cliff Moles was there too. I don't think he was there the second year. I'm not sure.

MEH: Did you work on the farm?

WT: I did work on the farm, more the second year. I wasn't on the farm crew but I did use the tractor and do things like that and I may have helped with the farm, but mostly it was still weed cutting outside. But [later] when I was at the farm, I milked cows. Ray milked them in the morning and I milked them in the evening. They had about seven cows, which provided enough milk for the school. They had chickens too, for eggs. In the summertime there was a garden plot and there was a garden crew then, I think, and Ruth [Asawa] must have been on that. But they didn't produce much produce, vegetables, things for the kitchen.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: So did you have any association with Josef or Anni Albers?

WT: I had [little contact with the Alberses]. Anni would come down to the loom room and work on her loom, but she was a rather quiet person. I do remember that she brought back from South America some pre-Columbian fabric, serapes and things like that, all in wool, and showed them to everyone. That was very interesting to think that these were five hundred years old. [Some were] for rain protection. But I'm sure I spoke to her and she spoke [to me], but we didn't seem to have [conversations]. Trude was somewhat distant too. Her mother was very [talkative]. I took bookbinding from Mrs. Jalowetz, and she was a very nice person and always so encouraging. This was an evening activity. She would get the books from the library there, and we would take them apart and resew them and glue them and bind them and so on, and she taught us how to make portfolios and letter cases and things like that. [Mrs. Jalowetz was] always encouraging. Whatever you did, she would say that "Well, that's good." [She told] us great stories. I wondered if Mrs. Jalowetz hadn't been a singer in Prague. Her husband—he died before I was there—I think he was a conductor there, because she told us one time about riding around in an open touring car, and I thought "Oh, you were a diva, weren't you." [LAUGHS]. She liked to remember those days. Oh, did I have much to do with Albers? When they came back and he had heard about the cleaning up. He was very pleased. They invited [a group of] us to come up to their house. [He had

plans] for what we should do. [We] realized right away that he was going to tell everyone what to do—the European again—although I understood that he had actually come from a farm, rural part of Westphalia or someplace like that. [We] would have to do it his way. This was like in the printing—Well, I didn't object to this, but [only] two typefaces were used. Bodoni and the sans serif type [Futura]. Those are the ones that Albers liked so that's the way it was done. He was [an authoritarian]. Now Martha will tell you he was marvelous. [DELETED TEXT] [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: So the—Did you stay for the summer between the two sessions?

WT: I went home that summer. But the next summer I was there for the summer program.

MEH: The summer of '49 then, when Fuller was there?

WT: I stayed for Christmas, I think, the first year. But I'm quite certain I went home the first summer because I can remember working at home and running the combine. I went home for the second Christmas when Frank Eisendrath was there and rode back with him. The school had changed a lot. The Albers and Dreiers and their faction had all left. Ray Trayer was Rector then, and Natasha and Ray were running the school at that time. I don't know whether Natasha originally got Bucky Fuller to come down, but he came down for a short time the year before because I remember [he] had a small trailer that was parked by the dining room—hall, and he lived there. I had read about Bucky Fuller and I was very eager to meet him, and he was just bubbling over with ideas on everything. [Natasha] got him to come down for the summer.

MEH: Let's stop—[TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION] You were talking about Fuller.

WT: Yes. He had built the Dymaxion car, that's what I heard about before. He was past that when he came to Black Mountain, but he had just been up at the Pentagon and set up one of his structures—what did they call it?

MEH: The Dymaxion structure?

WT: Yeah, but—

MEH: The domes.

WT: The geodesic dome. It was a very ingenious thing that was self erecting. You tightened up the cables and the pieces—it just rose up off the ground, from a mass of tubes and wires and so on, like this. They had put on a display at the Pentagon probably trying to sell the army on the idea of using these as structures up north. He had a group of boys who came with him to Black Mountain. I think they did erect [a dome] made of tubing. I remember he had a whole roll of Venetian blind slatting for metal louvers that are curved and will just straighten right out when they're not rolled up. They're stiff and straight, but light. Bucky would try anything with his ideas and these structures. His boys were always experimenting and making little models and talking about geodesic geometry and figures, polygons and so on. Bucky had theories about everything, and he did like to give lectures. His lectures were two hours [or more] and they went on and on and on till you could hardly keep awake. He had theories about everything. Before he came, Natasha was so enthusiastic. "Oh Bucky's coming down. Bucky's coming." It did dismay her that his science didn't fit her science exactly.

MEH: Now can you—Because from my understanding, the summer before they had just been neck-and-neck, you know. Everything was perfect. The second summer, there was a lot of conflict.

WT: Between Natasha and Bucky?

MEH: [AFFIRMATIVE] having to do—Do you remember specifically—?

WT: I don't remember that. Because I thought she was the one that got him down there, but maybe she was talking against his [theories]. She'd heard some of his talks or lectures. I don't know whether she was confronting him or not. But she would have not let it go, but I'm not aware of that.

MEH: There was something the second summer that had to do with—. he was using two metals together in these domes that would, you know, the tubing.

WT: Oh, and she said they were incompatible.

MEH: Yeah, they would corrode. [LAUGHS]

WT: Well that would be very likely. That could have been so. [AFFIRMATIVE]. I don't remember.

MEH: Did you take his class?

WT: No I didn't take his class. I was supposed to be working mowing lawns and [working at the farm and in the dormitories.] But I did go to one of his lectures. I thought it was [rambling]. [DELETED TEXT] He liked to be the guru and he liked to have a following. Kenneth Snelson was a student there, and I knew him quite well. We roomed together for awhile, and we were good friends. [Ken] was extremely enthusiastic about Bucky Fuller. Kenneth made tensile structures [using straight sticks supported by wires.] [DELETED TEXT] He worked on those. Well then I heard later on that there had been a breakup between Ken Snelson and Fuller, I was surprised, but then not surprised either. I never kept up with Ken Snelson. I understand he lives in New York City. But I guess I should. I thought he was a very nice guy. Fuller came out to Aspen to visit some people whose daughter was a student at the Colorado Rocky Mountain School where we were teaching, and I called him up to invite him to come down and see the school. It was at that time that he told me— I think I said something about Ken Snelson and it sort of seemed to not go. [LAUGHS] I don't know, somehow I was aware that something had happened. One of them claimed that the other one took something of his, an idea they had, I don't know. But oh, yes, let's see. Bucky's ideas like, well, that cars are nothing without a road, and of course that's true. Automobiles largely have to have a surfaced road to operate on. I really wouldn't have thought that exactly. Then he made a point about the cost of packaging. To buy products, a big part of that retail cost was in the packaging and in delivery. Well, I was interested in this. I thought yes, this is a great observation too. I think it was Ken Snelson who would come back and tell me, "Bucky's telling us this and so on. He's working out that we could buy these things for a half or 60 percent of what we're paying if it weren't for the packing cost." I related that to Ralph Borsodi's ideas of homestead living who was always making the case, the same case but a little differently, that producing your own food on your farm and taking care of the wastes and all this was a great efficiency. When we talk about the scale value, efficiencies of scale and production, this always justifies mass production because of the savings in costs when you can produce a lot at one

time. Borsodi would say, "Well they're not considering the costs in disrupting families to live close to the factory, to come to the factory, and all of that that goes along with it." [Borsodi talked] about the distribution costs, too, how they rose when you concentrated production in a factory. Then you've got the cost of getting it back out to the people. [So Fuller's observation and Borsodi's theory did fit.]

MEH: Do you have any memories of [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION] Do you have any memories of Charles Olson?

WT: Yes. Martha was a student of his. I didn't take any of his classes. He was a big, large man. I remember he would go down and see who—the patron saint of Black Mountain—Ezra Pound. Ezra Pound was in a mental institution. Maybe they were just getting him out of the way, I don't know, because he had been on the wrong side in the War. But Olson did keep up with him and so on. Right. The Bible of Black Mountain was Moby Dick and the patron saint was Ezra Pound. That's my story. [LAUGHS]. [This could be from Nell Rice.]

MEH: Did you leave the Black Mountain campus ever to go into the area?

WT: We went occasionally to Asheville, and I went on [camping] trips, and the weaving class went down to Burlington, saw Burlington Mills, and that was a fascinating trip. Another time the weaving class went to see Biltmore Industries in Asheville where they were hand looming suiting materials. We went to [visit] a woman doctor, a woman eye doctor, who had built a new house.

MEH: Dr. Weizenblatt.

WT: Yeah, that sounds right. We saw her house and it was a very modern house. One of the architects [connected with BMC] may have designed it. I don't know whether Breuer did it or not. But she was pleasant.

MEH: Who took you to her house? Was it—

WT: I think it was Trude. It certainly was Trude and [others in the weaving class]. I'm not sure. [Probably Lore Kadden.]

MEH: I'm trying to remember years. Was a Felix Krowinski there when you were there? Or the previous year? I'm going through some photographs of his. I think maybe he was '46-'47.

WT: He was the photographer?

MEH: No. Well, he took photographs. He wasn't a photographer; he was a student. But a group of students went to a nearby YMCA in apparently a black section of a town. I've got to identify—There was a speaker there whose face is very familiar. He had to be a civil rights leader at the time, and I'm trying to—I have a lot of photographs. I have to find out who the students in the photographs are and find out what that occasion was.

WT: It must have been the year before. I don't—I may have heard the name, but [now] I don't remember him. My parents became interested in Black Mountain, and they were going to come and help out. My mother did come down for awhile. She did some things to paint some of the interior rooms, walls, [in the dormitories]. We used milk paint. My mother had good ideas. She would have made it look nice. [We] were trying to make [the dormitories] more pleasant for the students. The ladderback chairs in the dining hall, were getting very saggy-seated. [DELETED TEXT] There was a hardware store in Asheville that sold colors, dyes, in bulk. You go in there and they put it in a sack for you, so

that's where we bought the colors to tint the milk paint with. Also they had some ladderback chairs that were just beautiful, hand-made ladderback chairs, and I was quite taken with them. I still regret that I didn't buy them. We asked if they knew someone who would reseat the dining room chairs, and they told us of this man who lived near Hendersonville. So we made arrangements, and Ray Trayer lent us his station wagon and we put all the chairs we could, the worst ones, in his station wagon and drove to this man who was a typical mountain craftsman. A little man, and so—Oh he was great. Yes, he would show us everything, and he did. He showed us how—I said, "Well how do you get these strips? How do you get these ash [maybe white oak] strips?" "Well, you pound on the log." He pounded on a log and he loosened [the fibers] and then pulled strips away. I think he did a little spokeshave [or knife] work to get them uniform. He put the seats, real ash [white oak?] splint seats, and they were beautiful too, and I'm sure durable. We went over there two times. I'm not sure whether he really did forty chairs, something like that. I thought, oh, what a treat this is. I mean here is a real mountain craftsman, and he had also made chairs.

MEH: You say he had made the chairs originally?

WT: He had made those chairs that I had wanted.

MEH: I'm a little bit confused. The chairs that you wanted were for sale in Asheville.

WT: Yes. One or two for sale in the hardware store.

MEH: But he had not made the Black Mountain ones.

WT: He hadn't made the Black Mountain ones. Those may have been there a long—Maybe they inherited them from Lake Eden property. [DELETED TEXT] The chairs this man had made had delicate turning on the top. He had long experience and he had been perfecting his work maybe not even realizing but always making it a little better. So I thought he was a real craftsman. He was entertaining too. He also did an Asheville radio program. He was a country singer of sorts and sang these old songs and so on, and he insisted on entertaining Mother and me. His children had just come down to visit from the city and he was a little scornful of them for living in the city. "They come down here to get butter."

[My first year I was invited to go on a trip with three other boys. The college was to get some] navy surplus equipment. Particularly a newer dishwashing machine. Howard, Rondy and Ed Adamy and Manuel Schauffler and I drove the school truck with a trailer behind it down to [a naval station] in [eastern] North Carolina. [DELETED TEXT]

MEH: You didn't go to Asheville or Black Mountain often?

WT: I went there quite a few times. I [remember going] to the railroad station in Black Mountain. I suppose in the year I went to Asheville four or six times, something like that.

MEH: So, your sister came down to work in the office the second year.

WT: Really in the kitchen.

MEH: In the kitchen. Her name was Ann?

WT: Yes. She was there eight weeks or three months. I think it must have been about eight weeks, whatever, winter term work session was. She worked a lot with Mrs. Rondy. Mrs. Rondy was such a capable person and could do

anything, and she told us “I went to Sweetbriar,” [LAUGHS]—a girls’ finishing school. Oh, Ann made her name at Black Mountain by making a dessert, an apricot torte. They had government surplus apricots that came in a big lug, and we used to take them out on hikes as something to chew on. You did really have to soak them up for a long time and they were somewhat bitter, acrid even. They weren’t bad. Ann used the apricots to make a delicious dessert. Mrs. Jalowetz [enjoyed Ann’s apricot torte.] “Oh, that dessert is wonderful.” Martha said that when she was there the next year, she said, “What is this? Who made this dessert?” and they told her, “Well, that was Ann Treichler’s invention.”

MEH: So why did you leave Black Mountain?

WT: Well, because they had run out of money. [The immediate reason was the school’s shortage of money. The real reason was a difference in outlook. In the spring of 1949 Ray Trayer had invited me to work at the farm. Later when I told Ray and Natasha] my parents would come down and help, [they were both enthusiastic, but when they read a statement of aims for the school my dad had written, Ray and Natasha realized they didn’t agree with our view of what the school should be.] [DELETED TEXT] [Mr. Pittinger came] down; he was supposed to straighten everything out. I don’t know that he could have, but he was there for awhile. The school had hired a local man, Mr. Elkins, who was a carpenter in the valley to do more work in the dormitories. They were pretty awful, barren upstairs and [down]. [Mr. Elkins made] bunkbeds, and I remember he did nice work. Well, they had to let him go and it was sort of hard for me. It was my job to say, “Well Mr. Elkins, we can’t afford to hire you anymore,” and, of course, he was disappointed. I said, “Well, I don’t think they’re going to be able to afford me very long either.” I don’t know what I was getting, but it wasn’t very much. In a few days, Pittinger told me that they couldn’t [deep me]. When my father, who was going to come down, came down, mother and I just went home with him and that was it. But I remember Bucky Fuller was there the day we left and he said goodbye to us. He was [always] very understanding and nice. He was friendly. Mrs. Rice was always so friendly to us, and so was her daughter, Mary, Frank’s sister—and her husband who was a school bus salesman in Washington. When they heard that we were going to go up to the Eastern Shore and visit Martha’s family, they said, “Oh you have to stay in our apartment” outside of Washington, and they just insisted that we stay, and we did. So, yes, people were very friendly.

[END OF CASSETTE 1; BEGINNING OF CASSETTE 2]

WT: Well, there were students who came primarily for the art classes, and they devoted themselves, just as I had to physics and chemistry, almost exclusively to art. There were some students who took sort of more the regular college classes, so they took history classes. Rondy taught English. M.C. Richards was there, and she taught English or poetry. The first year her husband—

MEH: Bill Levi.

WT: Bill Levi was Rector. Well, I didn’t take any of his classes. He was well less approachable than M.C. M.C. was a very friendly person. [DELETED TEXT]

MEH: There was Julie Scheier? There was a Dave Resnick there.

WT: [DELETED TEXT]

MEH: I don't know.

WT: [DELETED TEXT] But, I mean, there were the ones who were devoted solely to art, and the ones who had their own preoccupation in philosophical matters. Then there were the regular college students who were like Susie Schauffler and Harry Weitzer and the other—and Manuel Schauffler and his wife and sister and so on who were, you know, more like regular college students, taking some of all the courses. They would take the art courses [and academic courses].

MEH: Did you—Oh, were you at all involved the year that the Albers left in the conflicts that year?

WT: I heard a lot about it from Natasha. I heard about those conflicts. I can't really remember all of it, but they were bitter.

MEH: You had met your future wife at Black Mountain.

WT: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: Martha Rittenhouse.

WT: Yes.

MEH: When you left Black Mountain, what did you do?

WT: We went home, visited Martha's family on the way home, and I guess worked at home. Martha came out to visit. We were married in April of 1950. We built a cottage for ourself on the farm, our [family farm].

MEH: This was in Iowa?

WT: This was in Iowa, close to the village of Troy Mills, along the Wapsipinicon River, and all five of our children—Rachel, Joe, George, Barbara, and John—were born there. Our farm was along the river, and there was talk that the Corps of Engineers was going to build a dam down river at Central City, which would flood our farm. This never happened. But we were realizing that we were probably going to have to do something anyway, because we were living on very little money at that time. We were really self-sufficient, but I needed to either get a job in Cedar Rapids or try something else. I was always interested in having a school or running a school or doing something like that—probably infected at Black Mountain. I don't know. So we applied for a job at the Colorado Rocky Mountain School out at Carbondale, and I think largely because we'd had quite a bit of experience with organic gardening, John Holden hired me as farm manager, ranch manager. We went out there and spent a wonderful two years. Colorado is a beautiful place, and we made lots of friends out there and had a great time. A local man was hired to do the irrigation but otherwise [I] did most of the farm work on this 300-acre ranch. They had lots of horses. I'm not a horse person myself. Principally we raised hay to feed the horses over winter, but we did have a good garden, and we raised enough potatoes, more than enough potatoes, for the school kitchen and carrots and other things. Martha worked in the kitchen, and helped there, and we saved some money. So, then we had an offer to go to the Mountain School in Vershire, Vermont and would be able to teach. So we moved there.

MEH: The name of the school was—

WT: The Mountain School.

MEH: It was in—

- WT:** It was in Vershire, Vermont. We went there in 1968, and we were there for seven years. I taught science classes there and Martha taught French and English, and Martha went on to Goddard College and completed her undergraduate work, and they gave her full credit at Goddard for all of her Black Mountain work. I don't think that would have happened in any other place. But there was a man who—he was librarian or something, I can't remember, Martha can tell you, who had been at Black Mountain. So they had a feeling of a connection to Black Mountain.
- MEH:** Now in Vermont, were you aware of the Woodstock Country Day School when you were there?
- WT:** Yes.
- MEH:** Because that was founded and run by a Black Mountain person, David Bailey. Did you know him? [I believe John Holden and Anne Holden, who had founded Colorado Rocky Mountain School taught there one year. They visited us at the Mountain School.]
- WT:** No, but I think I have heard the name. That wasn't very far away. I'll have to ask Martha. I can't bring it back right now.
- MEH:** So tell me about the school. Was it a private school?
- WT:** It was a private coeducational college preparatory school. Both of them were. Actually, the Mountain School sent more students to prestige colleges than even—But they didn't have the enrollment that Colorado did. Colorado sent students to Colorado College, where our granddaughter has gone recently and likes very much, and to more western schools. They sent some to eastern schools too. It was more of an outdoor school, and skiing school.
- MEH:** So were you teaching at the Mountain School?
- WT:** At the Mountain School I taught physics and agronomy.
- MEH:** Had you gotten a degree along the way?
- WT:** No, I'm not a college graduate. I never graduated from college. [DELETED TEXT] That's why we went there, because we did want to teach. So then Martha finished at Goddard. She then went to Dartmouth and took their Master's in Liberal Studies program and finished that. Martha had very good results from her teaching and she'll tell you about how Charles Olson and people at Black Mountain influenced her teaching style and what she learned from them. I suppose Natasha influenced me, too, so [that] I taught [the way she had]. She gave me confidence, anyway, that I could do it, and she even set up one of her classes in—I was the teacher at Black Mountain, you know, she set it up [a math class for me to teach.] Well that was the old 4-H attitude, that if you taught you learned, and I think it is effective.
- MEH:** So when you left Vermont—
- WT:** Then we bought this farm. We stayed in Vermont until Barbara graduated—that was the summer of 1975. We bought this farm in January of 1971. We went on our grand tour to find a farm on Labor Day weekend, 1970 and even brought one of the students who wanted to come along with us. We drove around eastern New York State and stopped at different places looking for land. We had gotten this far as Horsehead down by Elmira, and we hadn't really found anything yet. Martha said, "Oh, let me call up—"—we had done research in the Strout [Real Estate] Catalogue—. "I will call the agent in Bath."

“Yes, he had a place.” So we [drove to Bath] and he showed us several places before he showed us this. He said, “But I think this one by Hammondsport is maybe what you’d like.” We realized, yes, this is [the place]. We made up our minds in twenty-four hours. We considered ourselves very lucky. So I’ve always given Martha credit. You know how they used to name Virginia plantations “End of Controversy” and things like that. I said, “Well, we should call this ‘Martha’s Persistence,’” but she didn’t like that name. But it was Martha who said, “We need to go a little farther here.” The student who came along with us later bought property in Danby and he’s since bought more property [nearer us]. He’s somewhat homesteading between here and Ithaca.

MEH: Now—Looking back now over these many years, do you think—Two things. First, what do you really think about Black Mountain now, looking back? How do you think it worked or did not work as an educational venture?

WT: Well, they made a lot about Black Mountain being a faculty-run school, owned and controlled by the faculty. [DELETED TEXT] I don’t remember any student quarrels. I’m sure there were students who didn’t like each other and they didn’t get along, but I don’t really remember any student fights or anything like that. But the faculty could not get along, could not agree, and this just happened time and time again. Mrs. Rice would tell us stories, because she had been there from the beginning, and how it had happened over and over and over again. I don’t think faculty-run schools work, and I’ve been thinking recently about—just working on writing this up. Well, how could Black Mountain have worked? There would have had to have been some person who had the vision and could control it. People aren’t going to buy that now. Yes, they had a lot of good ideas. After my faultfinding and criticism, I appreciate that there weren’t all those petty rules that they have in most colleges. There weren’t bedtimes [at Black Mountain]. In the morning on the way to breakfast there would be people in a smoke-filled [class] room—it would be solid smoke—and they’d been there all night long, you know, talking or [snoozing]. I don’t know. So there were no bed hours. You didn’t have to sign in or off the campus. There were really no grades. [DELETED TEXT] I think the school was not very efficiently run. I’ve always said, “What business [gets] paid before [it does] anything?” That’s true in schools. They all get the tuition first hand so they know what they have to work with. Yet schools notoriously run deficits and so on. If they were run as a business they would do better. Some people really did work hard at [Black Mountain College]. Some taught their classes well. I think the Rondthalers put a lot into it, and others too. But that’s nature. It’s the Commons Syndrome. Get out of it as much as you can; put in as little as you can. [Nearly] everyone there was very liberal in their politics. [DELETED TEXT]

MEH: So do you think Black Mountain had any real influence on your later work?

WT: Oh, I do.

MEH: How is that?

WT: Well, it enabled me to teach the science courses at The Mountain School—[gave me] the confidence to do that, and although we never had a school, we thought about it. We even had the idea, you know, that this was going to be the perfect school property. But home schooling has come. It’s a

marvelous idea—far superior to schools public and private. That was a phenomenon that happened and I think it's great. But there should be private schools. I'm an anti-government person. I don't believe in the public school system and all that.

MEH: Did your kids go to—Did you home school your kids?

WT: We didn't, but our grandchildren were home schooled. Lisa, George's wife, home schooled her children, and Barbara has been home schooling her children, but not exclusively. Lisa's two daughters—they were the oldest—Dorothy decided that she wanted to have more social contact so she went to Hammondsport School and later Elizabeth, their second daughter, went. But the boys remained pure [LAUGHS], and William is now in Corning Community College and Charles is just finishing home schooling. He'd be in high school now, but he stayed at home. But, no, I understand the girls perfectly. George and Lisa belonged to a very lively home-schooling group here, and there happened to be more young boys in this group than there were young girls, so the boys did have that social [contacts that the girls didn't have.] They have close friends who come and see them [often]. Barbara home schooled, but [they decided their children needed to go to] school, so they go to a [private] school now, too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]
[END OF TRANSCRIPT]