

INTERVIEWEE: SOPHIE HUNT FRENCH  
INTERVIEWER: MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

**MEH:** [GIVES IDENTIFICATION] Sophie, how did you come to be at Black Mountain?

**SHF:** Well, because I was married to Jack French. Jack French graduated from Black Mountain, went to Harvard, got his Ph.D., and went back to Black Mountain to teach, and I got married to him during that process so I went with Jack to Black Mountain.

**MEH:** You were married to him between the time he was a student and the time he returned as a teacher.

**SHF:** I'd known him for a long time. In fact, we knew we were going to get married for some years before we did. I was at Bryn Mawr, and he was at Black Mountain. There's no way my mother, who was a Bryn Mawr graduate, would have let me go to Black Mountain [LAUGHS]. Of course my sister went to Black Mountain too — But anyway —

**MEH:** Oh. Okay, so going back a little bit, how did you meet John French — Jack French?

**SHF:** How long do you want this story to be? My father, Jack's father, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt were all in the same class at Harvard. So I

don't know when I first met Jack. And the men knew each other slightly  
and I guess — yes.

**MEH:** Where did you grow up?

**SHF:** Lincoln, Massachusetts, which is a town right next to Concord,  
Massachusetts, and I was born in my mother's double bed in Lincoln, and  
I went to school in Lincoln and Concord Academy in Concord.

**MEH:** Okay, I was going to ask you — Concord Academy. You didn't go to the  
Cambridge School?

**SHF:** No, my father-in-law was principal of Cambridge School.

**MEH:** Right. I just wondered —

**SHF:** I worked there, that's all — That's really where I got — Jack and I decided  
to get married. I worked there for a couple of years, three years, I guess.  
But my father-in-law, John French, Nat's and Jack's father, was the man  
who moved the Cambridge School from Cambridge, Massachusetts out to  
Weston. And actually my mother went to the Cambridge School in  
Cambridge when she was a young girl, in the same class as Helen Keller.

**MEH:** So your family was from that area for a long time.

**SHF:** Yes. Yes.

**MEH:** Right.

**SHF:** We pahked the cah on the — [UNINTEL. IMITATING BOSTON ACCENT.]

**MEH:** So you had a background in progressive education if you went to Co —  
Was Concord really progressive at that time?

**SHF:** No, it was an excellent girls' school with very high academics, and it became coeducational I don't know how long ago. A great surprise to some of us, because when I was there it was all female.

**MEH:** So Jack French came to Black Mountain because his brother Nathaniel had been there.

**SHF:** Yes, but the whole French family was involved in progressive education and Nat got involved in starting Black Mountain, as you probably know, because he was at Rollins. Rice got fired and the young, a bunch of them — Norman Weston and others — followed Rice in setting up a new college. [BREAK IN RECORDING]

**MEH:** This is better. Tell me what you can tell me about the French family and Cambridge School — that whole background.

**SHF:** John French Senior was principal of Derby Academy in Hingham, Massachusetts for about, I don't know, twenty-five years or quite some time. And then he got hired to move the Cambridge School from Cambridge, Massachusetts out to Kendal Green, Weston, in what? about '31, I think. And so he was the first — the principal that moved that school out. And he was liberal. It was a co-educational progressive school. Have you ever been there? [BREAK IN RECORDING] Where was I at?

**MEH:** You were talking about the French Senior and the founding of Cambridge School.

**SHF:** And it was a progressive, coeducational, residential school by then. I mean, he moved the boys in, and there was a boys' dormitory, girls' dormitory, and it has been a very successful school and it still runs.

**MEH:** What did it represent educationally? You said Concord was really very traditional with a good academic structure and background. How would you compare Cambridge School to Concord?

**SHF:** Well, they both had very good academic backgrounds. It's difficult to compare because when I went to Concord, it was an all-girls school taught by all-girl, all-female teachers largely. [LAUGHS] And we wore bloomers to gym, and we had gym five days a week, and we got very, very good academic training. Cambridge School was different in that there was more student involvement in planning and a planned curriculum for each child. It was coeducation. The faculty was both men and women. Excellent faculty. John French was a very attractive, charming person. I'm forgetting the name of a modern educator that he had studied under and followed, but he had a devoted faculty and a very — built a very successful school. What can I say about it?

**MEH:** What do you mean by progressive?

**SHF:** Yeah. Instead of fitting the child to the curriculum, the curriculum was fitted to the student, I guess would be one way to put it. And students would, programs would be planned for individual students in terms of their individual lives. Of course, when you went to Concord, you took the program. [LAUGHS] And it was coeducational, but it had a highly — and a

very good academic standing from the very beginning. And now, I guess, it's one of the — It's tops. It's very well recognized.

**MEH:** Tell me what you can about the French children and their having had polio.

**SHF:** Well, yes, I guess I can, because my brother was a friend of theirs, and there were five of them that all drove from Maine back together in the fall of '31. And all but my brother came down with polio. My brother came down with a bad sore throat so he probably had some kind of immunity. But people were very interested in this family — everybody getting polio at once because at that time they were just finding out what caused polio. And well, my in-laws were wonderful. They took one of the other children into the house so there were Jack's sister ended up paralyzed in her legs and so forth, Jack's brother also —

**MEH:** So that's Caroline.

**SHF:** Yes, we call her Froggy. [LAUGHS] She looked like a frog when she was young, I guess. Jack had it only in his soft palate and talking areas, so that's — he didn't lose ever the use of his legs or arms. In working out what happened to the family, because the whole year right after they got polio they stayed in Boston, went in — Mrs. French got an ambulance and drove them all in to Mass General for [UNINTEL] and they thought that was great because they could use the siren. So they spent a year, and then Nat went down to Rollins because it was warmer and they thought it would be good for him. He had just finished a freshman year at Harvard. But they went down there, and then down there they all liked John Andrew

Rice, and he got fired so they all got together and started Black Mountain College. Norman Weston being very much involved — a very close friend of Nat's. And I don't know as I know much more about it.

**MEH:** Do you have particular memories of things that Jack French — you call him Jack, not John, right?

**SHF:** Yeah, he's Jack.

**MEH:** Jack. That he told you about Black Mountain in terms of when he was there as a student at Lee Hall?

**SHF:** I lived at Lee Hall one year. Oh, goodness. I visited there. I was very interested there. I knew Nat very well. Maybe you don't know this but the Frenches ran a summer camp in Maine for girls and boys. You know about that?

**MEH:** I want to hear what you can tell me about it.

**SHF:** Well, I was there as a counselor. So was my brother.

**MEH:** Was that before you were married?

**SHF:** Yes. And I wanted to go to Black Mountain because I thought Nat was interesting and I thought (knew?) Jack was interesting and I was interested. So I went and visited several times. So did my brother and my sister. My sister ended up going there.

**MEH:** We're going to jump around a bit, but first tell me about the camp. What was it like? The name of the camp was —

**SHF:** Alamoosook Island Camp. [LAUGHS] And it was a small coeducational camp for about thirty kids, and it emphasized water sports, canoeing,

camping very much, and eventually we bought a friendship sloop — that's a small boat — and then finally built a schooner so that we pushed sailing very much. And camp —the whole theory and so forth, camp's a wonderful time to teach people to live together, respect each other, and particularly if you're involved in boats and the water, you get discipline. You have to — discipline. So it was a small coeducational camp. I remember one counselor who said he didn't even want a day off. He didn't know any camper who wanted a day off because camp was just a great place he'd just as soon just stay there. But it was a small camp on an island.

Everybody had a job to do. We had a city — town meeting and elected things. There was the navigation committee and the post office committee and these things, and it was a pretty good summer camp. And that's — Well, because the family had known each other anyway, and my brother had gone to John French's camp, and my brother was a very good friend of Jack French's son, and I got there as a counselor. And Jack went first to Antioch, and as Nat got involved with Black Mountain, Jack decided he would shift over to Black Mountain because he was interested — there was nothing the matter with Antioch, of course, but he just thought he was interested so he went there and graduated from there. People must have been respectful because he got accepted at both Harvard and Columbia graduate schools for graduate study and got an assistantship at Harvard. Went to Harvard. Because he got an assistantship, we could eventually get married.

**MEH:** Do you remember his talking about Black Mountain or about John Rice or any of the faculty there?

**SHF:** Oh of course, of course.

**MEH:** What do you remember?

**SHF:** Well John Rice [OVERTALK] —

**MEH:** I assume he liked it there if he stayed and graduated.

**SHF:** Oh, yes. He thought that John Andrew Rice was a very interesting guy. He thought sometimes he was rather dictatorial [LAUGHS], thought he was rather unfair sometimes in his comments to his sister. The French family got quite close with the Rices. We brought their daughter to camp one summer, free tuition. It was a close relationship. What did Jack say about it? I just know he liked it and he was interested. So he went back to teach. One of the things I've been trying to remember and I can't at the moment is the name of this psychology professor.

**MEH:** Was it Straus?

**SHF:** No, no, no. Straus I knew. He was the one who came over from Germany.

**MEH:** Right.

**SHF:** This was an American and a younger one. And we saw him later.

**MEH:** I'm trying to remember who — Go ahead.

**SHF:** The psychology professor whose name I cannot remember at the moment had quite a successful career, and he was youngish. And he must have done a good job with Jack is all I can say because Jack went on to have a perfectly respectable career. And what else?



**MEH:** What do you remember — you were there the year they built the Studies Building?

**SHF:** Yes. I ran the cement mixer, and I planned also the work — who went to what job at what time kind of thing for a while. Eventually I became pregnant and had to cease some of my activities, but yes, I was there, and it was finished. In the second year we were there, we lived in Lake Eden, in that little cottage halfway up the hill on the right. It was wonderful. And I think her name was Naomi. I had Naomi, who had — who was somebody's wife who had her own daughter and she would come up and stay with Becky in the morning so I could go down and be Ted Dreier's secretary, stuff like that, and go back to my baby in the afternoons. What else?

**MEH:** Did you work on the farm? I think I have a photo of you sitting — somebody it's you sitting backwards on the seat of a tractor?

**SHF:** Oh, I might have done that. I could even have driven the tractor at some time or other, because I grew up and I did know how to drive a tractor. But maybe my job was kind of working out the work programs and so forth, and then I ran the cement mixer. We had a thing for dumping it in. And I don't really remember much more than that, but I remember Gropius came at one time while we were working at Lake Eden and walked around. It was a very interesting, exciting place to be. Am I right that Einstein came once?

**MEH:** He did visit for an afternoon.

**SHF:** That's what I remember — just the [UNINTEL] being pointed out  
[LAUGHS]. But I wasn't sure I remembered that.

**MEH:** What do you remember about Lee Hall? What was that campus like?

**SHF:** It was very interesting. You had the huge white building, and every student in it either shared or had a study, a big study, and most of them were pretty messy [LAUGHS]. And then professors had them too. We all ate in the same dining room. We went over for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, which was the other side of the [UNINTEL WORD] thing. Students eating with faculty. I always thought this was one of the very good things about Black Mountain was the interaction between students and faculty. We dressed up Friday nights, Saturday nights. Probably had a dance and everybody gets all dressed up for that. And there was — you were — you were sort of like not quite like the English foreign service, but there were times when you did dress up and get out of your jeans and all. And I remember Gropius, particularly, and also Anni, being concerned about neatness because the students were so messy, and they saw neatness as beauty. John Andrew Rice would have a talk every — I can't remember what day of the week — but quite frequently and sometimes people agreed with him and sometimes they didn't. But he surely was an interesting talker and —

**MEH:** You're talking about Rice?

**SHF:** Yes.

**MEH:** You said John Andrew Rice. But he was gone by the time you got there, right?

**SHF:** No.

**MEH:** Rice? Or are you thinking about Albers?

**SHF:** No, Rice was there too. When did he die?

**MEH:** John Rice? Let me just see. He left in '40-'41. No. No, John Rice had left when you got there in 1940 — the founder.

**SHF:** Well, he came back a lot then or something.

**MEH:** You think so? Okay.

**SHF:** No, wait a minute. '40. Did I get there in '40? Well, I was there before because Jack was there, you see, till '37 and I went and visited him.

**MEH:** You had visited him. That's what you're remembering from.

**SHF:** That's when I'm remembering.

**MEH:** And he would give a talk weekly and —?

**SHF:** Yeah, but I wasn't there weekly so I don't know. I just remember going to a couple of talks. And I remember when things — one of the things Jack was critical about Rice was the way that sometimes he would use individuals to educate something he was talking about in a way that wasn't particularly supportive of the individual. Did I say that all right? [LAUGHS] I've forgotten. You're right, when we went back — I'm mixing up now when I went to visit. I went to visit once for two weeks with my brother and my sister. I guess that's when she decided to go there. And so I'm mixing them up. We lived one year at Lee Hall and one year over.

**MEH:** What was your sister's name?

**SHF:** Martha Hunt.

**MEH:** Is she still living?

**SHF:** Smith. Yes.

**MEH:** Oh where is she?

**SHF:** Boulder, Colorado.

**MEH:** Remind me before we leave to get her address.

**SHF:** Okay. She went there for two years, I think. She didn't graduate. I think she — my family were living in New York and I decided she — I think she decided that that was enough and she came and went to Katharine Gibbs Schools to learn typing and shorthand so she could support herself.

[LAUGHS]

**MEH:** That was before Black Mountain.

**SHF:** No, after.

**MEH:** After Black Mountain.

**SHF:** Because she didn't graduate.

**MEH:** Not many people did. So what did she do later in her life?

**SHF:** Had five children. Did she have five or four? You see, I'm getting old. She — well she was — she was Gropius's secretary for a while. She worked in Cambridge, Massachusetts as a secretary, and then she married and after that she had these children. She mostly stayed home, and now she's a widow and she lives with one of her daughters — no she lives in a place like this out in Boulder, Colorado but moved out there because of one of

her daughters. She had lived in Cohasset, Mass, you may not know that but it's next to Plymouth and it's a very Massachusetts place in Massachusetts.

**MEH:** What did her husband do?

**SHF:** He ran a factory that he inherited from his father that was for cleaning the cotton — the machines that dealt with weaving cotton threads into cotton in the South. And that job of course eventually faded out but that was his main job. There was money in the family so it didn't particularly matter whether he had a job or not, I think.

**MEH:** What about — did you take any classes there as a faculty wife? Do I remember that you worked with Johanna Jalowetz in bookbinding or was it somebody else?

**SHF:** No, I never did that. As I say, I worked with Mort Steinau and with Ted Dreier in bookkeeping, and I worked sort of as Ted's secretary. I took some — I had majored in economics and I started — what was the name of the German? Kocher. I took some courses with him. Eventually something about him and I never had [UNINTEL]. Was because there was some Nazi in him or was it because I was pregnant, but eventually he turned me off completely and I didn't want to have anything to do with. So don't ever publish that.

**MEH:** Was that Kocher or was it Gothe?

**SHF:** Gothe. The German. Kocher was the architect.

**MEH:** He was the architect. No [OVERTALK]

**SHF:** Very, very good friend.

**MEH:** A lot of people felt that way about Gothe.

**SHF:** Did they?

**MEH:** Yeah. I think it was his style.

**SHF:** Yeah, he was German. Anyway. But some first pregnancies have some problems so I became less active after I became pregnant. But by the time we went back to Lake Eden, I had the baby and — We took care of it in the mornings, and I went back to being Ted's secretary.

**MEH:** What was it like to be a young mother at the college?

**SHF:** It was fine. [LAUGHS] Let's see — I'm trying to think of somebody who took a lot of photographs, and he took wonderful photographs of Becky.

**MEH:** Was it Howard Dearstyne?

**SHF:** No. Probably earlier than that. Probably Rudy Haase's friends. Then we took Rudy to camp with us in May, and that's how Rudy got to New England.

**MEH:** You mean how he got to Black Mountain?

**SHF:** No. He got to Black Mountain [OVERTALK]

**MEH:** That's how he got to New England, right?

**SHF:** Yeah, where he's lived — Well, now he's in Canada.

**MEH:** Right. Now I interviewed him and I think I remember he told me that.

**SHF:** Yeah. He went to Canada because we got involved in the Vietnam War, and he had three sons I think, and he did not approve of the war, and so they up and moved to Canada because his sons were of draftable age. I

think Rudy is still an American citizen. I don't know what his sons are.

They're all very successful individuals. One's a very, very good tennis player. I have pictures of him around somewhere.

**MEH:** Do you have other memories of the college, in particular — anecdotes, things that happened, visitors?

**SHF:** I remember Anni Albers coming up to see our baby once, and this was in Lake Eden. And she walked in the door of the cottage, and she said "Oh, it's neat."

**MEH:** She said what?

**SHF:** "It's neat." I don't know whether it was when you were there but she — They were appalled at the messiness of students because they thought it was so unartistic. What else do I remember?

**MEH:** What were the Dreiers like?

**SHF:** Oh, we knew them very, very well too because they sent their kids to our summer camp in Maine. Bobbie — she was a very important person around, actually, because she was Ted's wife, and she was just warm and friendly and — say an important person that people it seemed to me that were very important were people who in the dining room would go out of their way to interact with other students and things of that sort. Bobbie was that kind of person.

**MEH:** What about Josef Albers? What was he like?

**SHF:** Josef and Anni. It's funny, you want to say "sweet," but he was — I did not take a course with him. Jack did and Jack was always doing things with

paper, you know, trying to fold paper so it would hold a certain amount of weight or something of that sort, because of his class with Albers. At that point, I was still interested in going on in economics. Just a very warm, friendly, important people in the community. I don't have any particular individual memories of them except this one of Anni being so surprised how neat my cottage was. Oh, and I have a piece of weaving by her.

**MEH:** I think I remember that Jack French, in a thing that he sent in many years ago, said that you had a piece of weaving. Yeah, I want to take a look at it.

**SHF:** Well, I'll go get it.

**MEH:** You were saying this is a piece of weaving by Anni Albers?

**SHF:** Yes, and I don't remember why she gave it to me, but she used to have small pieces that she would make to experiment and work out different stitches and see what they're going to do. Maybe "stitches" isn't the right word, but whatever you use when you're weaving. And this is just a white — I suppose you'd say girl's scarf or tablecloth or something, but I've had it all these years so now — Well, I've had it sixty years. Can that be right?

**MEH:** More than that. More like — Yeah, sixty-five, thereabout.

**SHF:** Anyway, we were at Black Mountain in '40, '41, '42, I guess.

**MEH:** Like '39-'41. Because they built the Studies Building in '40-'41. Now you were there in '40-'42, because they built it in '40-'41 and then you were there at Lake Eden for a year.

**SHF:** Yes, one year at Blue Ridge and one year at Lake Eden. And then the war came, and I've often thought it was the war that killed Black Mountain,



because after the war it was never the same as it was before the war. The academic aspect of it changed into the more artistic. Jack and I went back once and — That probably was about — well, I think we had children then. It probably was before I went back to school to learn about deafness. I which was early forties.

**MEH:** I want to ask you about what you did after Black Mountain, but let's go back to — You were talking about an incident with the Babcocks.

**SHF:** Oh yes. We lived — had bedrooms across the hall. In those days — well, you probably know this — if you were young faculty, you just had a bedroom and a bath in one part of the building and a study or two, whatever you needed in the other part. We only had one — Jack had it. And one time we put, say, half a dozen alarm clocks set all over the Babcocks' room — you know, that would go off every twenty minutes. A childish thing to do. But somehow at the time it was terribly funny, and they thought it was funny too, but they kept going back to bed and another one would ring and wake them up. And that's something, I suppose, that neither of us ever forgot. But we did keep in touch with each other so that we visited them in Vermont and they visited us in Maine. They even once came to Ann Arbor, when they were coming back, and we visited them once in Yuma, Arizona. So those were our best friends there.

**MEH:** So when you left Black Mountain, this was during the war — 1942. What did you do?

**SHF:** Jack was studying with Kurt Lewin or Levine, depending on how you want to — and he took him out to Iowa City, and we were there one year. That's where our son was born. And then Kurt got him involved in research down in a faculty in Marion, Virginia, where Jack did the work that he's still most renowned for, which was overcoming resistance to change. They were trying to improve the production of the workers for the war — it was a pajama factory — and Jack's side of the experiment was to use group discussion and the groups get together and plan to do it and the others would follow the — oh, what do you call it, the workers did the most efficient handwork studies. And Jack's group produced much more than the other. And that became what he was best known for, actually, was that bit of research, which we did in Marion, Virginia. And then Marion, Virginia was the place where Johnny picked up meningitis or whatever and became deaf. And then Jack, who knew something about deafness because of having been a psychology student, and I decided that I'd better learn about deafness. So I went around visiting schools. Ended up at Lexington School in New York City and went back to Marion and said to Jack, "I want to go there and study" — because I thought that was such an outstanding school. So, that's what we did and I got a master's from Columbia. And when we moved to New York during the war, it was quite extraordinary. My father had a lease on a house we were able to get. I had a lovely black lady helping with the kids in Marion, Virginia. I asked her if she'd like to come up with me. She said "Sure," if she could bring Verna.

Verna was her daughter who was, say, twenty-five or thirty, so I went back to school and graduate study with two black ladies in my house helping me with my two kids. In a full-size house, during the war when nobody could get anything. [LAUGHS] Anyway, then I got my master's. And when I came out here to Ann Arbor — Eastern Michigan University, which was then Michigan — I guess it was State Normal School — offered me a job teaching so I spent twenty-five, thirty years training students, working with parents, working with deaf kids, working with all of that. So that became my career.

**MEH:** So your son's deafness really led to your professional work.

**SHF:** Oh, sure. All because — Well, I had no intention of doing it that way. I went to understand and take the training, but then the need — at that time right after the war— for special ed teachers was so great that it was just sort of I did something and I did. It turned out to be very useful. And Johnny liked it too.

**MEH:** Good. Do you have other memories of Black Mountain — things that you think that we haven't talked about?

**SHF:** Sure. John Evarts. We used to see John Evarts quite frequently. He would come to Ann Arbor to visit some musical friend — I'm not sure I can remember. And we saw him once in Europe. We saw John periodically, I guess. We kept in closer touch with him than any other faculty member other than the Babcocks, of course. Mort Steinau. Where'd he end up, New Jersey? Pennsylvania?

**MEH:** He ended up eventually in Connecticut, and then they lived on the Cape, after he retired, after they stopped working.

**SHF:** Cape Cod?

**MEH:** And he died maybe two or three years ago.

**SHF:** His wife was younger.

**MEH:** Right. Tell me more about John Evarts? What was he like?

**SHF:** He was wonderful. You know, he would sit down at the piano, and he'd play pieces, people's personality — he'd make up the music and we'd guess who it was. And he just was a lovely, warm, good friend and a very good friend of Nat's. I have a hunch he came to Maine, but I'm not sure of that. I'm sure we saw him in Massachusetts. It was somebody we kept in contact with. Not as close as the Babcocks but, as I said, — I'm wondering — recently somebody knew — I was talking with someone about him but I can't now remember who it was. He was very important as not only a group entertainer but leader, a person whose personality affected everybody.

**MEH:** I think you're right. I think that his leaving the college, when he went into service, had an enormous effect because his playing for community dancing and the portraits and all of that was just key to the spirit of the community.

**SHF:** I would think it would be.

**MEH:** He could really bring the community together.

**SHF:** How soon in the war did he have to leave? Pretty soon?

**MEH:** Pretty soon. It was either — It may have been in the fall of '42. Right after you left.

**SHF:** Once I knew — was he in England in the war once? France?

**MEH:** France, I think.

**SHF:** France. Well, we saw him in France.

**MEH:** Jack was exempted from service because of the polio?

**SHF:** Yes. It was crazy, because Jack physically was pretty good. He had polio in this area. And he went in expecting to be drafted, and they didn't even look at him physically. They asked (?) at his medical records and he'd had polio. They let him go. [LAUGHS] It was wonderful. Whereas Nat, who was very badly paralyzed really — he ended up in a wheelchair and all — I think they made him at least undress and go through a few exercises. But, yeah, Jack was just 4-F, like that.

**MEH:** What — were there three French kids? Caroline, Nat, and John.

**SHF:** They all had it at once.

**MEH:** What did Caroline end up doing?

**SHF:** Well, I think polio kind of ruined her, really. She was a very talented person. She was artistic and sculpted, and she also played the violin, which she had to give up because of polio. And she went to Black Mountain for a couple of years, and then she got married and had a daughter and mostly she would work in dramatics. She would get a temporary job at a school or something of that sort, and as everybody was polio [UNINTEL], as she got older she got more and more physically

dependent. So she probably — She married twice, and she didn't have a profession. She was very talented — could have — but didn't. And I think one reason why Jack would be critical of John Andrew Rice was John Andrew Rice would — Caroline was one of the ones that he would somehow pick on at times. But I think just before World War Two, you see, we were very liberal all over America. I mean a lot of it. For instance, Bryn Mawr is close to Princeton. Princeton had an organization called Future Veterans, because everybody was against the veterans marching on Washington to get more money when people didn't think we were ever going to have another war, and veterans didn't need more money. They had more money than most other people, anyway. So Princeton set up this thing called Veterans of Future Wars. Bryn Mawr set up the group called Future Wives of Veterans of Future Wars [LAUGHS]. And we were all — Then in the beginning most of us were pretty much against the war because we just thought the world wasn't going to have any more wars. And it took a while to really believe, yes, you had to stop, you know. In fact I had a sociology professor at Bryn Mawr and I can still remember him saying "Young ladies" — this is when Hitler was thinking of going into Poland — "we've got to stop that man right now." They always called us "young ladies." He was right.

**MEH:** Do you have any memories at parties at Black Mountain? What did you do to entertain yourselves?

**SHF:** I think we entertained ourselves all the time. I can't remember when, but there were parties. Were they weekend parties? Were they Friday or Saturday or just Saturday? I don't know. But we would dress up and dance at one time. We had — Barbara Steinau — No, that's not the name. Barbara Sieck? Derek Bovington? They were such a handsome couple. We — Mostly we used to put on long dresses for Saturday night I suspect it was. And there was one time she just came in a very handsome street outfit, which made all of us in our silly long dresses look ridiculous. What's happened to her, do you know?

**MEH:** I don't know. I've tried to find out, but I haven't been able to.

**SHF:** Well, she and Derek — And he was killed.

**MEH:** Right. What about — Did you ever leave Black Mountain to go into the surrounding area — into Asheville or Black Mountain?

**SHF:** Not much. Jack was always — Jack was a mountain climber and a skier — a nature person, and we spent most weekends hiking or walking or climbing or doing [SOUNDS LIKE: Clingman's Dome] or something, so we didn't do that. That wasn't Jack's lifestyle. I don't think people did very much, at least when we were there. Well, don't forget we were in the Depression too. We didn't have any money, so I wasn't in Asheville more than — well not very much. I do remember when the war broke out, one of the first things I did was went and bought a sewing machine because I thought I was going to need that for my children's clothes and what have

you. And I did do that in Asheville. I don't think I ever went to the theatre in Asheville.

**MEH:** Do you remember the bombing of Pearl Harbor? You would have been at Black Mountain then.

**SHF:** Yes, I remember the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

**MEH:** Do you remember the reaction at the college? Where you were at that moment?

**SHF:** I remember someone, but I don't know who it was, telling me as I walked up the hill to the cabin at Lake Eden. And that's why I think somehow that World War Two killed Black Mountain because all the young men suddenly — all the young faculty — suddenly had to do something different. I don't remember it particularly. See, I didn't have any close girl friend there, particularly, except for A [Anne Babcock], and that was mostly the four of us — not just the two of us — which is unusual for me. I usually have a good girlfriend somewhere. And I suppose we talked with Ted and Bobbie about it. I don't seem to remember that very well. I just knew that Jack knew right away he had to do something else. Well, I don't know. That's not right. I don't know which came up first.

**MEH:** Are there questions that you think I should have asked that I haven't asked?

**SHF:** I don't really know. I — I guess there's some — One thing, and maybe I've already expressed it. To me one of the most important things about Black Mountain College was the real community aspect of it, that — and the



emphasis that you were living in a community and everything was community-based. In the dining room, I can remember that — because I was pregnant there were certain foods that I got more of than some other people did and going to the kitchen to arrange that. I remember when Mark Dreier, who had been to camp, died. You know that story, I presume.

**MEH:** What do you remember about it?

**SHF:** Oh, well, I remember the horror and the shock, and he was — had been given a ride on the running board of somebody's car, and I've forgotten the name of the very nice guy.

**MEH:** Jack Lipsey.

**SHF:** Ah, yes. And I remember mostly the shock because it was almost the first time any of us had been involved in the death of a young person like that. And I remember how wonderful Bobbie was about it. Bobbie would say things like she was so glad he was happy when he died, or something of that sort. She was that kind of a person who would always find something good to say about something.

**MEH:** How did the college as a community handle this? You were all very young.

**SHF:** We didn't think we were very young. I don't know. And I don't know how much it affected other people. We knew the Dreiers better than some did, partly because their kids came to camp and also because Ted Dreier had a very good friend who lived on Martha's Vineyard. Here I'm going to go with names again.

**MEH:** Give me a second. It's funny — I'm losing it too. I know who you're talking about.

**SHF:** Lived on Brattle Street in Cambridge? And we knew them very well, and they were very involved in Cambridge School and Jack's father. So anyhow, that's how we knew the Dreiers better than some other people, I think. What was the name of that man?

**MEH:** I can't think myself.

**SHF:** They had money and they gave — They were interested in Black —

**MEH:** They have an island — they lived on an island, Naushon. I can remember the island. They have a place there but — Oh, what was his name. I can add it later.

**SHF:** At any rate —

**MEH:** How did the community work? When you were there were there a lot of squabbles?

**SHF:** What? At Black Mountain? Not that I know of. There might have been. I wouldn't have known them, though.

**MEH:** I think you were there sort of between crises. It was sort of the —

**SHF:** Oh there was the Bob Wunsch — Yes, we were, sort of between crises, because there was a to-do about Bob Wunsch. When did that occur?

**MEH:** That was later. That was after the war.

**SHF:** It was.

**MEH:** Were you involved at all in the theatre there?

**SHF:** No. I grew up living out in the country in Lincoln with a brother who was two years older than I, and my father took us for the weekend — the two of us — out into our back yard. I can use an ax as well as a man. I did everything my brother did with my father. And the last thing in my mind at that time would have anything to do with either art or drama. I took piano lessons, but I wasn't any good at it and I really wasn't interested in music either. I was just interested in building. We built a stone house. We did all sorts of wonderful things. But I was not a —

**MEH:** What do you think was the effect at Black Mountain of having the refugees there — the Europeans?

**SHF:** What was the effect on Black Mountain?

**MEH:** On the community.

**SHF:** Brought some good manners, for one thing. [LAUGHS] Wow, that's a toughie. It would be a very good effect, a sort of an elevating effect. I suppose it made us pay more attention to what was going on than we had been before. But mostly was it was brought marvelous teaching. I was about to say — I can remember at first being frightened of Straus. I had sort of forgotten about him until you mentioned him. He was more the Germanic type than some others. Who were some of the other professors? Oh, the Jalowetzes. Music. I didn't take music particularly. I think he was — What was his name?

**MEH:** Heinrich.

**SHF:** Heinrich. He was involved with everybody with music, but I think she was sort of in the background, kind of, wasn't she?

**MEH:** She taught bookbinding, but she was definitely a background type of person.

**SHF:** I had even forgot about the bookbinding.

**MEH:** Do you remember May Sarton's visit to the college? The poet, May Sarton?

**SHF:** Oh, May Sarton. Well, yes. But my mother knew her. [LAUGHS]. So — Was I there then? [OVERTALK] Or did I know her in Peterborough. My mother knew May Sarton in New Hampshire — quite well, so I'm a little mixed up on that. I think my thoughts are confused between the two places.

**MEH:** [BREAK IN RECORDING] — twenty years ago or so. She died a long time ago.

**SHF:** That why I guess I was trying to remember and think. Cynthia never married again?

**MEH:** No.

**SHF:** She had a young sister too, but the sister didn't go to Black Mountain. They both came to our camp. I get things mixed up.

**MEH:** Right. [BREAK IN RECORDING]

**SHF:** — ninety.

**MEH:** I was going to ask you how old you are. Well at ninety, you are blessed to be, have such a sharp mind.

**SHF:** I was ninety on July 4<sup>th</sup>. I was born July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1915. So I'm a firecracker.

[LAUGHTER]

**MEH:** That was a long time ago. You've seen a lot of things happen in your lifetime.

**SHF:** A lot of changes. I don't think you could have started a Black Mountain College right now.

**MEH:** It would be a very different place.

**SHF:** I was about to remember the name of that family in Cambridge. But it didn't come.

**MEH:** Sophie, what did your children — You had two children.

**SHF:** Yes. And Becky is the oldest, the one — Gosh, I almost thought of the guy who took so many pictures when I was at Black Mountain. Becky is a Ph.D. from Boston University in clinical psychology, and she's a graduate of Harvard. She married and went with her husband to Vermont. She has two daughters, and she is divorced from her husband. And one daughter is in New Zealand and the other daughter was here this weekend. This is John's [UNINTEL]

**MEH:** Did Rebecca — did she work?

**SHF:** Becky? Yeah, she's been a clinical psychologist.

**MEH:** She's a clinical psychologist. Right.

**SHF:** Yeah, she's worked all these years. And she's brought up her two daughters because her husband kind of vanished.

**MEH:** And your son?

**SHF:** Johnny is the deaf one and he — he was brought up — Well, the time he came along, everything was signing versus talking. And we put Johnny in the talking role direction, and he went for seven years to the Central Institute in St. Louis, which is a school and research center, and lived there, and then he would come home when he'd go to Maine. Then he came back and graduated from Ann Arbor High School here, and then he went to Gallaudet College in Washington D.C. — the college for the deaf, do you know about that? Well, Abraham Lincoln set up this national college for the deaf in Washington D.C. and it is practically no tuition college for the deaf. From that he got into the University of Michigan where he got a master's in marine zoology and he's just finished working twenty years for the U. S. government studying zebra mussels, which I don't know whether you've ever heard of zebra mussels or not but — And he has one son and he lives — He went to Vassar. [LAUGHS] Still laugh over that. Can't get used to a son going to Vassar. Anyway, Anderson [PH] wants to be an architect, I think, but he's kind of fun because he went to Vassar and majored in art, because they didn't have any of the things in math that he might need for being an architect or that kind of thing. So he's fun. He's fun to go to a museum with or something because he'll look at a painting in a completely different way from what I will. [LAUGHS] And that's my family, I guess.

**MEH:** It sounds like a good family.

**SHF:** Yeah. They all came to Maine for my ninetieth birthday.

**MEH:** Right, and that was in July. Where is your property in Maine?

**SHF:** This is what my father-in-law gave my mother-in-law for a wedding present, and it's — I don't know how well you know Maine —but it's about five miles from the sea and it's on a lake, and it's just a very small, not-very-well-known place.

**MEH:** What happened to the camp? Does the camp still exist in any form?

**SHF:** Yes. Well, it isn't run as a camp. But that picture of Jack was taken in Maine, with the blueberries, and funnily enough it all came to me because Nat's children died off or weren't interested, and Caroline's daughter died, and there was me left. And Johnny and Cathy — I mean Johnny and Becky and I have decided to give it to the three grandchildren right now instead of in my inheritance to the three grandchildren and all that. It's just on a small lake very near Castine, Maine, which is about thirty miles from [UNINTEL] Mt. Desert and that area.

**[END OF INTERVIEW]**

**[END OF RECORDING ON THIS SIDE OF TAPE]**

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**