

INTERVIEWEE:               FREDERIC GOLDSMITH  
INTERVIEWER:              MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

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

**FG:** Well, it started probably when I was just a tyke, because we—my mother and father bought a house in Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, which is a suburb of Milwaukee, in 1923. And just down the block was the president, lived the president of the Milwaukee State Teachers College, and they had a training school, which was called the Normal School at the Teachers College. And we were enrolled – my sister and I were enrolled in that school. And we went to grade school there. And it was a progressive school where all the new techniques were practiced. And during that time my sister Nell, who was a year older than I, graduated before me and from high school before me and got to know a girl who was a year older than she named Ruth O'Neill. And Ruth O'Neill, who had been at Black Mountain College the year before my sister Nell was there, introduced her to Black Mountain College. And my father decided that maybe that was a good thing. And when I graduated in 1943, they sent me down to Black Mountain. My sister was there at the same time. So, I got to Black Mountain basically because of Ruth O'Neill.

**MEH:** But you're part of a larger family that was there.

**FG:** I think a larger family that probably was there after I was.

**MEH:** Well, I think – Well, I know Pete Hill and Barbara Hill Steinau were at Black Mountain before you were, and then Gerda Cook Slavson was there after you were.

**FG:** That's true.

**MEH:** So—Gerda is a cousin?

**FG:** Gerda is a first cousin of mine. Her mother and my father were brother-sister.

**MEH:** Okay. And do you know the connection to Pete and Barbara Hill? That's a little more complicated.

**FG:** Well, it is a little more complicated, and I think they were cousins or cousins once removed of my father's. I don't quite know the connection there.

**MEH:** Okay. So the-- Obviously, you had heard about it from your sister so you – It wasn't a total surprise. Do you remember when you went the first time, how you physically traveled to Black Mountain?

**FG:** We took the train to Asheville, North Carolina.

**MEH:** From?

**FG:** From Milwaukee. And I traveled with my sister because she was going back for her second year. And we were picked up in Asheville by the school and by car transported to Black Mountain.

**MEH:** You and Nell, and then you have another sister—

**FG:** I have another sister, Ann[e], who is eight years younger than I am and she's got a varied life also.

**MEH:** She was saying that she went to Goddard.

**FG:** That's correct.

**MEH:** So what did you do at Black Mountain? You stayed one year.

**FG:** I stayed one year at Black Mountain College, and while I was there I volunteered for the U. S. Army Air Corps. After that year, I transferred my residence from North Carolina to Milwaukee, and so it took quite a while for that to get transferred, as far as the army was concerned. And I was one of the last of my group in Milwaukee to go into the service, but that happened after the experience at Black Mountain.

**MEH:** What at Black Mountain—you were just out of high school—was there anything you particularly wanted to study at that point?

**FG:** No, I didn't know what I wanted to do at that point, and I took general courses basically and spent quite a bit of time in Molly Gregory's woodshop and quite a bit of time with, in Albers weaving. And I did quite a bit of weaving and quite a bit of woodshop and work around the campus.

**MEH:** What other classes did you take besides weaving and woodworking?

**FG:** It seems to me that I had a math class, and I had another class with Paul Radin and I had a music class, so – It's been a long time.

**MEH:** What did you do on the work program?

**FG:** One of the things that I can recall—the college would get coal, lump coal, in an open-top railroad car, and we would by hand toss that coal into a dump truck and load the coal into, back to the school from the siding and get it into the furnace rooms. I can also remember one time they were clearing a field for planting, and we were cutting down trees and sawing them up. Another time I can remember

on the farm we were cutting pigs. And then also there was a mica mine, and we all worked in the mica mine at one point or another.

**MEH:** Tell me what you can remember about the mica mine? What was it like? Where was it located?

**FG:** Now it escapes—it was over in the farm area somewhere, and it sort of escapes me as to exactly what it was like. I can remember with a pick-ax we were picking out —

**MEH:** Was this like a cave. Like space you went into?

**FG:** Yeah, sort of like a cave, yes.

**MEH:** And Fritz Hansgirk was managing that? Do you remember?

**FG:** I don't remember the name. No. I think he was before or after me. I don't remember that name at all.

**MEH:** And you were — This was during the war, so there were a lot of refugees there.

**FG:** Yes. I can also remember a car coming on the campus, and they were selling corn, corn liquor. And I swear there was a still up in the mountains somewhere and I tried to find it but couldn't. And so they hid them pretty well, I guess.

**MEH:** What was Molly Gregory like? How do you remember her?

**FG:** Molly Gregory was a very jovial, very likeable person, and I enjoyed being with her at the woodshop. I did quite a bit, and I actually made some wooden plates on the lathe in [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION] in the woodshop, and they -- I still have them and I think there are still six. I made them for my mother, who is now dead, and I have them back again.



**MEH:** Good.

**FG:** I can remember one other thing. We went to a religious tent meeting off campus, across the road and down the road a little bit. It's a little foggy at the moment.

**MEH:** That's interesting. Like a revival meeting, or whatever?

**FG:** Like a revival meeting, that's right. And there was a stream across the road to camp, and we would go and swim in a pool over there. It was great fun.

**MEH:** That was like beyond the dam? Was it across the road?

**FG:** It was across – actually the road from Black Mountain, the town, to camp, and it was across that road and back in the woods a ways.

**MEH:** Because I have photographs of people there, swimming and hear about it, but I've never really determined just where it was. It was a walking distance.

**FG:** It was a walking distance, and we would go over. And there was a natural pool that we would swim in.

**MEH:** Did you swim in Lake Eden?

**FG:** We swam in Lake Eden. Enjoyed that very much. And I can remember a number of moonlight swims that we had in Lake Eden.

**MEH:** Was this the first time that you had been in the South?

**FG:** Yes. Yes, I hadn't been in the South before. As a matter of fact, I don't think I was much out of Wisconsin, maybe into Illinois and to Minnesota, but I don't think

I'd ever been away. Well, wait a minute. In high school, I went on a trip with one of the coaches—in high school I went with one of the coaches from the grade school out to Glacier National Park and back on a bus trip and that was before I went to Black Mountain, yeah.

**MEH:** Eric Bentley was at Black Mountain that year. Do you remember Eric Bentley?

**FG:** I do not.

**MEH:** You don't remember the big controversy over integrating the school? Do you remember that?

**FG:** No. No.

**MEH:** So you really weren't that involved in the political aspects of the college.

**FG:** That's correct. No, I wasn't at all.

**MEH:** Did you do anything with the theater, with the drama?

**FG:** Yes, I was with the drama, and I can remember one time we drove up to—oh where was that?—to give a play. Chapel Hill, I believe. And so we, we had I think a couple of cars and a truck, and we drove up and gave the play and then drove back to Black Mountain.

**MEH:** If this was 1943 and during the war, there were very few healthy male students at the college.

**FG:** I suppose that's true, although I didn't think that there were – I'm sure there were more female students than there were male students, but it didn't seem to have any effect one way or another, really.

**MEH:** Right. Do you have other memories of the college—things we haven't talked about? What about meal-times or –

**FG:** Well, I can remember the cockroaches in the dining hall and in the kitchen. And we'd try to step on them and kill them and so forth, yeah. I can remember in that music course that I had, we were supposed to think up a tune. And I got started and then I just blanked, and I couldn't continue with anything. It just didn't seem to come to me. I love classical music and listen to it all the time, but it just wouldn't come to me to write the notes down.

**MEH:** This was – Who was teaching this? Jalowetz or Lowinsky?

**FG:** Yeah. Jalowetz. Yeah. A stray dog came into the campus one time, and I kind of befriended it and would feed it. And it was a mix, I think, mostly German shepherd. And it hung around quite a while and then all of a sudden it was gone.

**MEH:** You had your study in the Studies Building?

**FG:** I did. And my study was on the south side so I had sunshine in the study room, and it was very enjoyable. It seems to me I had an old mattress up there, and so I could take naps and rest and so forth in the study room.

**MEH:** Was there any construction going on when you were there?

**FG:** No. There was no building construction whatsoever.

**MEH:** Who were other students you particularly remember?

**FG:** The names seem to—

**MEH:** Talk to me about Will Hamlin. Was he there when you were there?

**FG:** No, I wasn't there.

**MEH:** He was at Goddard.

**FG:** He was at Goddard. And Swackhamer – Egbert Wanderink Swackhamer. He had an older brother who had been there before, and Swack was there the year I

was. I believe he's dead now. I tried to look him up in California some years later and never could find him. There are other names that I can't seem to recall at the present time.

**MEH:** What was Anni Albers like as a teacher? Did she actually teach or did somebody – ?

**FG:** She actually taught weaving and she – I think she was a fantastic weaver herself. And she was teaching it to us and I think they had six or seven looms there. And I spent quite a lot bit of time weaving, and I have no idea what has happened to all those pieces that I did weave. I think I gave them to my mother and—who knows? They're gone.

**MEH:** Right. That's too bad.

**FG:** Yeah. Right. I was hoping that maybe some of them were still around because I would pass them on to the Asheville Black Mountain Museum.

**MEH:** Well, if they should turn up, you should do that.

**FG:** I will. I will do that if I find them.

**MEH:** Probably if, you know, one of the siblings has them. The problem is sometimes they aren't identified, and people don't realize what they are.

**FG:** That's true, that's true.

**MEH:** But you might check with both sisters.

**FG:** I'm sure that they don't have it, and lord knows what has happened to them.

**MEH:** Right. So why did you leave Black Mountain?

**FG:** Well, I went into the army, and I spent some time in the army air corps. And when I got out of the army Air Corps, my father said "Well, it's time to get an



engineering background,” so I went to the University of Wisconsin and spent four-and-a-half years at Madison, getting a B.S. in mechanical engineering. Then I joined my father in business, and eventually took over the company that my grandfather started – on my mother’s side.

**MEH:** Was your father an engineer?

**FG:** He was a self-made engineer. His father died when he was twelve, and I think probably if he hadn’t died, he, my father probably would have become a doctor. But things were tough after my grandfather died.

**MEH:** What was the name of the company, and what did it do?

**FG:** The company was the W. Clasmann Corporation. It was my mother’s maiden name.

**MEH:** Is that C-L-A-U-S?

**FG:** C-L-A-S-M-A-N-N. And he – my grandfather, who started the company, emigrated from Germany. He was born and raised in Kamp- am-Rheine, which is a little village south of Boppard. And he and his father emigrated to the United States. He had two sisters, and their mother stayed in Germany. They were going to make their fortune and bring them over. Unfortunately, my great-grandfather died before they could do that, and so he actually brought over just the two sisters because his mother had passed on too. But he was working at the Pabst Brewing Company and had become the chief power plant engineer for Pabst. And the prohibition came in, and he decided the beer business was maybe not the place to be so he started his own business in 1916, selling equipment allied to the power plant, and was of great success. And his son, my

mother's brother, joined him in business. And my grandfather died the year I was born, in 1925, so I didn't know him at all. And my namesake, Fred Clasmann, asked my dad to join him with the Clasmann Corporation company, which he did. And three years later, my uncle Fred died, and my father had the business. And a brother of my Uncle Fred joined my father after that, and I came in about '51 or '52, so three of us and a secretary. And we were selling product to the power plant industry, and then we branched off into the heating-ventilating-air conditioning field and sold products to the sheet metal contractor industry. My father died in '63, my uncle left us in '67 or '68, and I was – I found myself in business with another man who left me in '70. And here I was with a secretary and myself and a bunch of product to sell to people in Wisconsin and the upper peninsula of Michigan. Well, I brought in some more people, and we finally wound up with about twenty-five in our company, and it was somewhat of a success. The company is no longer in business.

**MEH:** You had children.

**FG:** We have three children. I married Janet Tippett in 1955, and we had a daughter Gwen, in '56 and daughter Barbie in '58, and then a son came in '64. And they, our son, Will, is married and living in Colorado. His wife works for the Olympic Committee as the director of partnership development. And our daughter lives in Aurora, Colorado, which is a suburb of Denver, and she works for a pharmaceutical company. And the middle child, Barbie, lives about thirty miles away from us here in Wisconsin. They all have given us a granddaughter – the latest of which came on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, this year, and the oldest was an

adoptee from Mexico at birth that our daughter, Gwen, the eldest, adopted and has raised. She is still a single mother, and the child is now fourteen and an A student.

**MEH:** Looking back, do you think Black Mountain had any real influence on you?

**FG:** Well, I think it must have had some influence on me, if nothing to just widen my perspectives. I'm not sure that the educational pluses were that great for where I finally ended up, but I think it probably did open my eyes some.

**MEH:** Do you think there are questions that I have not asked that I should have asked?

**FG:** I really don't feel that way, Mary.

**MEH:** Okay. Are there particular anecdotes or memories that you have that we haven't talked about that you might like to record?

**FG:** Well, while I was chopping trees in that field at the farm, I swung an ax, and I hit just the top of my boot and cut my skin at the ankle and had to have a couple of stitches. And then we went into town to get supplies, and I was on top of the pickup truck—no, it must have been the dump truck. And I was trying to hold on to a bag of probably chickenfeed. That slipped and fell off the truck and splattered all over the road, which was terrible because the school couldn't afford losing that kind of thing. And that bothered me.

**MEH:** Do you have any particular memories of the food in the dining hall?

**FG:** Not really. It was – a lot of it was Southern food, and I wasn't used to that of course.

**MEH:** I think also this was the war years and so, you know, they had food ration cards.

I know that the cook who was there before you were there—or was Jack Lipsey still there? Do you remember?

**FG:** I don't think so.

**MEH:** I think he had left.

**FG:** I think we had a gal.

**MEH:** Anyway, you know, there were a lot of complaints about the food and he was saying "Look, you know, we get canned peaches. That's what we get," because of the rationing during the war, the limitations.

**FG:** I didn't think that it was all that bad.

**MEH:** Did you have any experiences regarding the segregation in the South? Going into town or anything like that?

**FG:** No, I don't recall anything like that. I do remember that we did go into Asheville at one point. We saw Porgy and Bess, which was the first show that I had ever seen, stage show. And that was a great experience. But I can't recall a whole lot of details.

**MEH:** Yeah, it's interesting. I know there was a lot of corn liquor in the area—white lightning, whatever. And I know that people at the college knew where to go and get it, but I didn't realize that people actually drove into the campus –

**FG:** They drove onto the campus and were selling it who were buying it. It was very interesting because I had a relationship with Janie Stone. Fred Stone was in the army, and Janie was on campus. And Janie had been the biology assistant the

year before, and she knew where the green alcohol was so we didn't have to buy corn liquor. [LAUGHS].

**MEH:** Well, Buncombe County was dry so people had to have some resources.

**FG:** That's right, that's right.

**MEH:** There was another question on my mind. What was it? I can't think right now.

Okay, well, those were some interesting – Everybody comes up with something different.

**FG:** Yeah and piece them all together and [OVERTALK]

**MEH:** Exactly. Exactly. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

**FG:** I think my father was kind of a free-thinker.

**MEH:** Yeah, to send two children down and another to Goddard.

**FG:** Right. And when we went out to Maine – we drove this last fall, and we went through Plainfield, and we swung through the campus at Goddard. I did visit my sister Anne when she was there. I had been working in Connecticut for one of the companies that we represented here in Wisconsin, just to get some factory experience, how they made the product and so forth. And so one weekend I went up to Goddard to visit Anne, and I can remember vividly what they served: liver and bacon, which just about gagged me. [LAUGHS] That's like—about all I can remember about that particular weekend trip.

**MEH:** When you were speaking of Southern food. Was that like fried chicken and mashed potatoes?

**FG:** Fried chicken and they had grits, which I kind of like grits, but – And then they would have some green leafy stuff, and I don't know what that was.

**MEH:** Probably collards.

**FG:** Yeah, we had collard greens or whatever, which wasn't like spinach. [LAUGHS]

But—

**MEH:** True. How did you dress at the college?

**FG:** Casually, very casually. I don't think I had any dress-up clothes at all. Jeans and slacks, and I think I had a couple pair of shorts, maybe, that I wore when the weather was nice. But nothing fancy.

**MEH:** Do you remember any parties? Dances?

**FG:** No, I don't. Don't. There was – I just can't remember names of people who were out there at the time.

**[END OF RECORDING]**

**[END OF INTERVIEW]**

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**