Interviewee: RUDY HAASE
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

RH: My name is Rudy Haase, and I went to Black Mountain College from 1939 to 1942.

MEH: [GIVES DATE] You talk. I can't talk. How did you hear about Black Mountain?

RH: My mother read an article by Louis Adamic in Harper's Magazine. Actually this became a chapter in his book My America, a chapter with the title "Education on a Mountain." Louis Adamic obviously visited Black Mountain and had been quite taken with it, and my mother was quite taken with his article. Since in those days I was – I was quite used to listening to what my mother said, I ended up going to Black Mountain. Actually my uncle, Carl Haessler, had been a roommate with John Rice at Oxford University. They were both Rhodes Scholars, so I visited the college in the spring of 1938, with my Uncle Carl Haessler and met some of the faculty members then.

MEH: Where was your family living?

RH: Oh, I lived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and I was a fourth generation American but in a very German community. My mother, amusingly, didn't learn to speak English until she went to high school, even though she was a third generation

American. German was spoken at home and in the grade schools that she went to.

MEH: Incredible. So, you went down with your uncle.

RH: Yes.

MEH: And this was what year?

RH: This was the spring of 1938, and –

MEH: Okay. You were in high school.

RH: I had graduated from high school – No, actually, this was the spring of '39, because I graduated that same spring and then I was accepted and I started school here at Black Mountain in the fall of '39. I came down by train from Chicago, and I was met by Ted Dreier and Claude Stoller, who was also a new student. He lived in New York – I think in the Bronx – and he was, so he was the first student I met, and he became a very good friend of mine and still is a very close friend. We subsequently both, along with Bob Bliss, studied architecture under Larry Kocher, but that was the second year. The first year I think all of us took rather general liberal arts courses, and I had no particular direction which I felt I would be heading. But I decided to study architecture. Then I – just to go a little ahead of myself – I transferred in 1942, when the War started, and studied naval architecture at the University of Michigan. This was interrupted by the War, so I am now a graduate naval architect and that has been my official career although I spent most of my time in my life actually on conservation projects.

MEH: Okay. What does a naval architect do?

RH: A naval architect designs ships, but I was more interested in yachts so –

MEH: I always heard of you as a shipbuilder.

RH: Well, in 1967, my family – three boys and my wife – emigrated to Canada, to Nova Scotia, and I bought a boatyard which had the reputation for building the finest wooden yachts in that province, and I named it Blue Nose Boatyard, and I still own it. We've built very fine yachts, some of which I design, for about twenty-five years.

MEH: (OVERTALK) These are for pleasure?

RH: Yes, pleasure yachts.

MEH: Going back to Black Mountain, you had no idea what you really wanted to study.

RH: That's right. Not in the first year.

MEH: With whom did you take courses?

RH: Well, in the first year I took a course in English from Ken Kurtz, mathematics from Ted Dreier, and, oh, psychia-, psychology – psychology with Jack French, who was just, just had graduated from Harvard and was here, and he was a fine young teacher. Also, political science with Bob Babcock. Jack French and Bob Babcock were two young professors here, both of whom I liked very much. Jack French probably did more to change my life than anybody else, but not because of Black Mountain so much, just that I met him here. Because he recommended me to his mother, who owned a camp, a boys and girls camp on the coast of Maine, and I was hired as a sailing counselor. I went there as a counselor, as the skipper of their schooner, and finally I helped build a new

schooner for about seven summers, first one before the War and six after the War. Then, as a result of that, that introduced me to the Maine coast, and so I actually moved to Maine after the War. Otherwise, I probably would have never gone to Maine.

MEH: So you – getting back to Black Mountain – what in Louis Adamic's article had appealed to your mother?

RH: Well, my mother was really very much of a free thinker. She was very unorthodox, you might say. Well, she came from a rather unorthodox family, and she was a great believer in individualism and had a great – She was very much concerned about injustice and that sort of thing. I got into all sorts of scrapes at school, mostly because she put me up to things which I wouldn't have ordinarily done otherwise, because they were matters of principle. She always was a great one for standing up for principle. My mother, of course, affected my life very much as a young, as a child, and I suppose that's carried on. I'm still very much concerned about injustice in the world and [abroad??], and she was of course a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and all that sort of thing, so we went on anti-War marches way, way back when I was a child. So, that sort of tradition has carried on with me and my family.

MEH: What do you remember about Larry Kocher?

RH: He was not only a, you know, very good architect, but I think, more than that, he was a humanist and a person who had a very broad outlook on the world. In other words, as I mentioned in my comments this afternoon, he suggested that

I should do more reading of Thoreau and because of it – I indicated an interest in nature, but I hadn't really read extensively and that sort of thing. So, I felt that that was worthwhile. He was my advisor who had more of an interest in me than just teaching me architecture. I think that this Studies Building, which he designed, is an amazing thing, because a lot of the people who look at it say well, it looks like a factory, sort of utilitarian and all that sort of stuff, but it was, very purposed design, something that was to be built with a very low budget and with amateur labor. I think it proved very successful in that regard, but some of the other buildings, houses that he's designed and other work that he did, just showed what a range of interests he had. Of course, he was editor of the Architectural Forum or Record, one of those two magazines. Then after he left Black Mountain he was an architect of Colonial Williamsburg, so he had an interest in old buildings and historical architecture, too.

MEH: What do you remember about the actual construction of the Studies Building?

RH: Well, of course, I very early on got interested in this fieldstone masonry which I'd never done before. At first we dug ditches and poured foundations. I wheeled hundreds of wheelbarrow loads of concrete up very narrow ramps, ran them up two-by-eights, which is amazing now to think we didn't fall off. But then when it came to working on the stone part of the foundation, then I pretty much concentrated on that. While other students, particularly Bob Bliss and Claude Stoller, were leading a carpentry crew, I kept working on the stonemasonry. I built a stair tower, which is now at the front of the building. I did that all myself, and that was a long process. I spent most of the spring of 1941 on that, while

the rest of the building was going up behind. Then later, of course, I, as all the other students did, finished off my own study. I think that that building of the Studies Building was a great part of my experience there. The practical parts. I really enjoyed that.

MEH: And after you left Black Mountain – You left Black Mountain (OVERTALK)

RH: Well, I transferred to the University of Michigan specifically because of the war situation. My father, who had never been very eager to see me go down here in the first place – he wanted me to go to a conventional university, but he sort of acceded to this idea. But when the War came along, he suggested that I should get into something a little bit more serious. Since I was always interested in yacht and ship design, I transferred to Michigan. I was treated very well, I thought, at Michigan. They, they gave me probationary credits for every single course that I took at Black Mountain. The condition was if I maintained a B or better average in the new courses that I took at Michigan, which were subsequent – For example, I mentioned that I took physics here under Peter Bergmann. Well, I was able to take a more advanced physics course at the University of Michigan, and if I did well then, which I did, then would confirm the credit for the earlier ones. That's the way it worked out. I got full credit for everything, the type of course which they would have taught at Michigan. There were some courses that they didn't even recognize, but I mean for the courses like math and physics and history and those sort of things which I could put a handle on in their curriculum, I got full credit for that. One thing I discovered which was a little bit alarming to me is that we supposedly had no grades here

at Black Mountain. But it turns out that there were secret transfer grades given, and only after I'd transferred to Michigan did I find out what these secret grades were.

MEH: Were you surprised?

RH: Well, I was a little bit shocked by some. I think there was one teacher who gave me a very poor grade because of a conflict on quite another matter, and although I previously had no reason to dislike him, I felt that he had secretly taken it out on me in the grade, because of quite another matter, quite aside from my work in his class.

MEH: Did you – Oh, you mentioned your interest in conservation. Sort of what form did this take?

RH: Well, specifically, I founded an international conservation organization named Friends of Nature. That was founded in 1954, specifically to save an island on the Maine coast. But we've since expanded, and we now have members not only in the United States then, but in Canada, of course. That's natural, because I moved there. But also in New Zealand and some in other parts of the world. It's relatively still a small organization, but at least it's carrying on. It did sort of pioneer work in many fields. For example, we published booklets about the dangers of pesticides before Rachel Carson's Silent Spring. In other words, we really predated Rachel Carson, and one of our authors, Beatrice Trum Hunter, provided lots of information to Rachel Carson when she decided to write that book. I played a little bit of a part of a role in getting Rachel Carson's book published, because the – I persuaded Paul Brooks, who was

Editor-in-Chief at Houghton-Mifflin – a very good friend of mine, we had worked together on conservation projects in Massachusetts – to publish the book. He had told me, he said, "Well, we've agreed to go ahead with it. We'll lose money, but we think it's a very important book." Well, it turns out it made his career there, because it – not only was it an important book, which we both recognized, but it made a lot of money for Houghton Mifflin and it was one of the great books that they published.

MEH: As you look back, what do you think was the real influence of Black Mountain on your later life? You mentioned being introduced to the (INAUDIBLE).

RH: Well, I think that, just as mentioned this afternoon by quite a few people, the exposure to the many different people, the faculty members and the students and the whole, the independent thought and the life, just so broadened my experience so that I feel that my life has been greatly enriched and everything I've done by having had a broad, general education, and with insights that have been supplied which I never would have gotten if I'd gone and just concentrating on one field and had a very narrow education. So, I think the individualism and the close contact with the faculty and the variety of the students is very important. I don't think that it necessarily has to be unique right here to Black Mountain for that sort of thing to happen, but it takes a whole combination of factors, which did take place here, and which was very fortunate for me. I –

MEH: Do you think if you had exposure to those same people in a traditional academic environment, the impact would have been the same?

RH: Well, probably not, because I think the work program played an important role. Other than getting work done, I mean things were built and so forth, but I think the idea of combining practical physical work with academic education is a good one. The interplay and the insights that you learn actually while you're working with some of these people in that way is so much different from the classroom. For example, it was Ken Kurtz who, of course, I had him in the classroom – he suggested that we go and plant the white pines along there. Well, we went up into the woods and brought down and planted these little white pine seedlings. That was an idea of his which I just went along with. Of course, while we were doing that, we were talking also about a whole variety of things, because then there wasn't any, any course structure involved, and so that was just very broadening. Then, as it turns out, it was a wonderful thing because when Mickie and I visited in 1952, that – what had been a woods over there, a forest, was now an ugly gravel pit, on the other side of the road, but the college, which of course was then still here but more or less, you know, approaching its end but we didn't know that then, the whole view here would have been of a gravel pit, which would have been so awful. But instead we were looking at this nice row of white pines, which Ken and I had planted.

MEH: That's interesting, because we were talking last night and wondering whether they had been planted later or at Black Mountain. They give you the real sense of entering a special place as you go (OVERTALK)

RH: No, when the college bought this property, and I first, you know, that was about the time – When I was at the college, when we first came over here, there was

this lawn went down from these lodges. It just went right down to the road. There were no trees there then. There may have been a few shrubs and things. On the other side of the road was the woods, so that was the thing – woods on one side, lawn right down the other. Ken just thought it would be a nice idea to have a row of trees to block out the road. Little did either of us realize that we'd not only be blocking out the road, which wasn't that bad, but the destruction which took place on the other side. That, that's the only thing that – Martin Duberman interviewed me. I mentioned a whole lot of stuff, but the only thing he put in his book, and it's in a footnote, you probably can look that up in the index, is this fact that Ken and I planted those trees.

MEH: What do you remember about Ken Kurtz?

RH: Well, some people saw him maybe sort of, you know, cold and sort of rather conservative, a type of person who really didn't fit in with the place because he didn't – well I guess he wasn't a drinker or carouser and that sort of – of course I wasn't that type either, and that was – But I felt, I really liked him as a faculty member. It was not because of the classroom, which he did conduct in a more formal manner. His classes were much more formal than the other ones. He maintained that sort of academic formality. But that's why I feel that getting to know him better planting the trees was a real plus, because I, as a result of that, I considered him one of the <u>good</u> members of the faculty, but there were other people that, you know, that didn't think so. Then there was Gerry Barnes. Gerry and Walter Barnes, and they were so different. Did you know either one of them?

MEH: I didn't know them, but I've heard.

RH: Well, Walter was the extreme example of the – You know, you almost feel like you're going to Oxford. I never saw him any time without a suit or tie on. But Gerry, his younger brother, was very informal and quite unacademic, and he was sort of looked down upon, I think, as sort of being sort of a lowbrow type. But I liked him. I chose him as my advisor the first year. People said, "Why would you choose Gerry Barnes?" and so forth. Well, I had to choose somebody. It was because people just thought he just wasn't up to the caliber somehow, but I don't know, I think – He had some good influences on me, too, and I kept in touch with him and Katharine until both of them died. They lived in Denver. They were two of the faculty members – well, not two, I mean they were two but of several faculty members that I kept up with. Others were A. A. and Bob Babcock. He became Lieutenant Governor of Vermont, Governor – he lost within a few votes of becoming Governor, and then after that they moved to Arizona, and we exchanged Christmas cards, but no more contact than that. Of course, I kept up with the French family. Jack French just died a few weeks ago.

MEH: He did die? (INAUDIBLE). Was John Rice still there?

RH: No. He had left just before I came, so I never met him. I did meet him when I visited with Carl. I met him. But he was not here when I went to the college.

MEH: Did you take Albers' courses?

RH: Oh, yes. I took drawing with Albers, and I enjoyed that very much. I – He made some – I was embarrassed at times by some of the comments he made,

because I was a bit shy, you know. But in hindsight, I guess that was a very valuable experience. But at the time I was always a little bit nervous about going to the class because I wasn't quite sure what he was going to say about what I did. I was a little bit fearful in that regard.

MEH: How does it feel to come back? Is this your first time back?

RH: No, I – We came back in – Mickie and I visited here in '52, and we had some discussions with Mr. Huss – was it Huss who was here then? (INAUDIBLE) what's the name of the head of the –

MEH: Rector.

RH: Rector! Right. He was the rector then. But that's when we just looked around and saw how things were. Then I came back in 1984, eleven years ago when it was already Camp Black Mountain, just introduced myself to whoever I saw and said I was – They were all – Oh, sure, make yourself at home. Look around. That was it. It hasn't changed too much since then, although I didn't really explore it very much, but I mean I got the same impression this time as that time. I mean – It's nice that you can come back and see things not completely changed. I think the worst thing that they've done is – and sacrilegious in the extreme – is that Bill – of course, he changed his name to Alex – Alex Reed's quiet Quaker house into that.

MEH: That's the only change that I really object to.

RH: Yeah. We expected other things to happen and, you know, it's appropriate when it has major changes, but to do that to that building I think was awful.

MEH: Thank you very much.

[END OF SIDE 1; END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF RECORDING ON THIS SIDE; NO RECORDING ON SIDE 2]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]