

Interviewee: GWENDOLYN CURRIER JAMIESON
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. Do you go by Gwen or Gwendolyn?
GCJ: I go by Gwen, usually.
MEH: How did you come to be at Black Mountain College?
GCJ: Well, first of all I had gone to New Jersey College for Women, which now is called Douglas, part of Rutgers. I was there two years, and to me it was – I just thought it was just like high school. I was bored with it. That's the thing. So I stopped and I went to New York City then – boy, I was really young and naïve. Someone told me about an ashram in Harlem, a group of people living with certain values and as a co-op. I lived there and I worked at Carl Fischer Music Company, just menial work, filing and answering the telephone and receptionist recording studio, little things. Then my father had been to Blue Ridge to some conferences – nothing to do with the college, but he found out about the college. I was looking for something different. I was thinking of – what's that Quaker college – now, I can't think – in Ohio? Antioch. I had Antioch in mind, but he came back. He told me in glowing terms about this Black Mountain. Maybe they were in session while the conference was going on. I'm not sure. So he really told me about Black Mountain, and I hitchhiked down there with a young man I knew—no special relationship—and visited, and decided to go there. Although I do remember, when I visited, I had a great feeling of inadequacy about it. I mean it gave me a feeling of –
MEH: You mean you felt a sense of inadequacy about the college or it made you feel inadequate?
GCJ: No, about me. About me. For some reason. But anyway, I wanted to go and I went, and that's how I got there.
MEH: That was what year?
GCJ: Boy, when you put me down to dates – I would say, I think I was there '42 to '44. '44 was the big split, wasn't it?
MEH: [AFFIRMATIVE]
GCJ: I left during the big split – in protest.
MEH: Okay. You were there two years?
GCJ: Yes.
MEH: So that was during the War.
GCJ: That was during the War.
MEH: Did you have any idea what you wanted to study?

- GCJ:** Let's see, what was I doing at – I wanted to do – I did music. I don't know that I had – I didn't go there for the music, but as a matter of fact I got there and I took my cello. That whole year I'd been working in New York, I had left -- I had abandoned -- I hadn't done anything with my cello and I decided I wanted to give it up. Got down there, they had three great musicians and pianists too, Cohen, Lowinsky, and Jalowetz. I wanted to study piano with one of them. Well, they ganged up on me. They wanted me to do the cello, and, of course, Trudi Straus played violin, Gretel Lowinsky played viola, and they said "Nothing doing. We're not going to teach you piano. I've got to do cello."
[LAUGHTER] So that's been good, because cello's been an awful lot to me in my life and they got me back onto it, I guess. I didn't have any teacher, but Gretel Lowinsky sort of coached me a bit, Jalowetz had me playing the Beethoven sonatas with him, and they sort of pulled me along. Then a cellist was stationed – there was an army station down on the main road there at that time – Mischa Slatkin was there. I don't know how they knew – got in touch with him, but he used to come – I know, he used to come up to the school to concerts and things sometimes. So I worked with him for a while. In fact years later I met him up at that Vermont Music and Art place. He came one summer for just a few days. Then, of course, we had the great music institute, which you know about—very exciting, extraordinarily exciting—and the Graudans came, Nikolai and Johanna Graudan. You know all these things. So, of course, I studied with him. In fact, after that summer we made our departure, about half the college I think, and I studied with him for the next few – until he moved to California – the next few years, became very good friends with both of them.
- MEH:** Did you have any idea – do you think you recognized, when you were at Black Mountain, what a treasure you had in having Lowinsky, Jalo, and Cohen as –
- GCJ:** I did realize what – you know – great musicians they were. Yes.
- MEH:** In that small community that here you had this faculty with . . .[OVERTALK] really would honor any university, would do honor to any university.
- GCJ:** [OVERTALK] I know. We had all this talent from Europe, that's really what – Yeah.
- MEH:** How would you compare the three of them as teachers?
- GCJ:** You know, you wrote about them something in that book, I remember. I know everyone adored Jalowetz. I don't know what it is he had. Even when the college was splitting up, there were factions. It was just terrible. People wouldn't talk to each other going down, passing on the road. Even then, he was never selected – he was never on a side. Everyone still liked him. I don't – didn't study with Jalowetz an awful lot. Most of my courses were with Cohen and Lowinsky, especially Lowinsky, the theoretical courses. Lowinsky was very kind of lacking in humor, very strict, very academic. Good, though. Good.
- MEH:** How was this accepted at Black Mountain, this technique of teaching?
- GCJ:** I don't know. I don't know that – I don't remember what the reactions were. But I know that – Well, I remember one time, April Fools' Day came along. Well, he knew nothing about April Fools' Day from his culture, but someone got the idea in the, our class – of course, classes were only four or five people, got together in this project We took the piano—because he would lecture and then

he would demonstrate on piano -- they took the piano and would put paper in all the little, in all the little hammers on it in such a way that when he sat down to play it sounded kind of like a harpsichord. [LAUGHS]

MEH: It was an early prepared piano.

GCJ: [LAUGHS] Yes. I don't think he really enjoyed the joke. We were kind of sporting with him, I think.

MEH: Who were the other students who were serious about music then?

GCJ: Well, Samuel Brown. I saw a lot of Sammy Brown. He was a real good friend of my husband's, before anyway. He had this terrible arthritis that crippled him. Did you know that? At one time, before I knew him, he had to walk bent over. He couldn't let his head up. Jimmy's uncle, Smith Peterson, uncle through marriage, operated on him -- he was an orthopedic surgeon. You know, he couldn't do away with the infirmity, but he got the spine straight so that Sam could hold his head up which apparently made a big difference to him.

MEH: I knew that he had had surgery, but I didn't realize that he was that bent. Okay, so did he, did he know Jimmy Jamieson before Black Mountain ?

GCJ: Yes. Yeah.

MEH: Now, was Jimmy Jamieson there at the same time you were at Black Mountain?

GCJ: No.

MEH: You met him --

GCJ: Jimmy had graduated, I think just before I came. In fact his, I think the date is on that thesis I had out there. He had graduated and he came -- he was a conscientious objector and so is my family, my brother, you know. I came from a family of war objectors and I am. I didn't follow my family in a lot of ways, but there I'm very convinced of that philosophy. But he got a leave, a little leave from his -- he was put on alternative service. I've forgotten whether he was in a camp then or at the Brattleboro Retreat where he spent quite a bit of time just -- without getting paid, just as assistant in a mental hospital. But anyway, he had a leave, and he came to Black Mountain to visit and that's how I met him.

MEH: What -- what do you remember -- Do you have memories of the college that you think are particularly -- ? We'll come back to that later. Just a second. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING] Okay. Where were music classes held?

GCJ: The Round House. You remember -- Oh, you weren't there. Well, you know of the Round House.

MEH: Yes, adjacent to the Dining Hall.

GCJ: Yeah. That was -- that was the little music room.

MEH: Did you take part in any of the choral things?

GCJ: Yes, I did, and that's where, when I worked with Jalowetz mostly, I guess. For some reason, I didn't want to sing, and Jalowetz was very disappointed about that, but I did do it -- but I was reluctant, let me put it that way.

MEH: What do you remember about the Work Program?

GCJ: Oh, I loved it. It was great. A great idea. I mean, as opposed to athletics. Well, athletics had their point, teamwork and that kind of thing, developing skills. But that was one thing that attracted me about Antioch. They had a work program, but their work program was a period of time when you went out and had a job.

Then you came back to study. I loved that Work Program, and I particularly liked to get the farm jobs when we had farm jobs.

MEH: How did you decide what jobs you had?

GCJ: I don't remember now whether we were assigned – You know, I'm seventy-five now, and that was way back. I don't remember whether we were assigned. I think we were. What was his name, Mangold? Oh yeah, I just remembered him. I think he assigned jobs. I'm not sure. You know, I shouldn't give you information that I don't know.

MEH: That's okay. There's a lot of –

GCJ: But I remember jobs like putting in fence posts, and I hated that. I guess I must have been given it – where we had to dig those holes. That was hard. One time I had a job helping Bas Allen with plumbing, and that was very instructive. I learned a lot, just following him around, being kind of an assistant, handing him his tools or something like that. I think that's a great idea to make – to get away from pure academics and learn a little practicality in life.

MEH: Had you worked on a farm before?

GCJ: Well, I used to spend summers on a farm when I was in my teens – early teens, I guess. I liked it, yeah. I didn't know – See now I'm just crazy about my garden and growing things. This might interest you. I was just reminiscing after reviewing some of that book. You know, I never studied with Josef Albers because I just didn't have the time. I was doing music and a lot of other things – chemistry. But I knew him, because it was a small community. We talked. He was one who explained about biodynamic farming to me, what it was. I never heard the term, and he explained all about it. Well that's actually what I'm doing now. You know, it just occurred to me that I don't know that that was the influence that he told me about it—

MEH: How did he explain this to you? How did he describe biodynamic farming?

GCJ: Oh, my gosh, I don't want to try to review his words way back then. But it's something about the returning everything – the used soil you return to the soil, and you make a cycle all the time.

MEH: I've heard that he had his own little garden at Black Mountain. Do you remember that?

GCJ: I don't remember that right now.

MEH: What people always remember is he had cactuses growing among the tomatoes. [LAUGHS] His little touch of Mexico he brought back.

GCJ: Oh!

MEH: What about recreation? What did you do for entertainment at the college?

GCJ: Well, they had – What did they do? Saturday nights they had sometimes dances, I think. I don't remember. I remember going on an all-night hike up in the mountains once – if you call that recreation. It was very exciting. Bas Allen led a small group up one of those Blue Ridge mountains. We slept out under the stars, heard a wildcat. I remember he said, "Don't worry, it's scared of you. It won't come near you," and stuff like that. I don't know. I don't remember. I think we just entertained each other, you know. We had a lot of sociability and –

MEH: Did you take part in any of the drama productions?

GCJ: No, I didn't.

MEH: Did you take any of Eric Bentley's classes?

GCJ: No, but again I knew Eric Bentley and Fran very – you know, pretty well. I was always a bit intimidated by Eric because – what was he, satirical?

MEH: Sarcastic? Satirical?

GCJ: That, I guess, a bit. Fran I liked. Everyone liked Fran except those who didn't like her at the split. But a very pleasant person. But I didn't study with either of them.

MEH: First, the summer of '44, the great Music institute.

GCJ: That was just great.

MEH: What do you remember about it? Are there particular people or incidents that –

GCJ: Oh, it was such a heightened experience, the feeling. Then we had our first Negro student then. I don't remember her name now, but we had –

MEH: Alma Stone.

GCJ: Oh yes!

MEH: Talked to her.

GCJ: Oh, yeah, it just came back to me. Does she remember that, with pleasure?

MEH: Oh, definitely.

GCJ: Well, we had just, just great peo- -- You know, Kolisch, and Kolisch gave some lectures. They played a Schoenberg -- early Schoenberg quartet and he had slides up with the score and talked about it, and it was just a very great experience, really. Then listening. I could listen to their rehearsals before their concerts, and their concerts if they were Saturday night – I think they were, were just – We were just all bowled over by them. I mean there was just – You know, we were a small community and you know how the intensity of feeling can build up sometimes. Well, it built up. Yes.

MEH: What do you remember about the – Do you remember anything about the discussions about integrating the college?

GCJ: Oh, yeah, that was going on all the time.

MEH: What is your feeling about different positions – What do you remember about the discussions that took place?

GCJ: Well, they became very heated, you know, very emotional. That was the trouble. Not, not cool and logical. But now I look back, and I feel that I was – I was a young brat. I really was to some of these people, and I can see why. These people, well, Straus once had a tirade against me. I've never been spoken to like that before. He just lost his cool. I mean he – he exploded. It was just terrible. I remember it was outside Bob Wunsch's room, and Bob Wunsch later spoke to me about it. He'd heard it. I felt crushed.

MEH: What was the nature of it?

GCJ: It was over the Negro issue, over the integration issue. I can see now these people had had to give up their homes and leave, and this was a threat to the college. We could have had reactions from the community that would have been maybe a disaster to the college. I, being young and liberal, you know, wouldn't mind taking that chance. But they would. Of course, they would. I can see it now, but I couldn't, I didn't think about that then. But what I hated then was the hostility that happened, that we'd been living together as a community.

Maybe everyone didn't like each other but we were very civil, and some of that went – There were certain people who wouldn't talk to other people as they passed. I thought it was just really awful.

MEH: Who? Who were the people who would not talk to other people?

GCJ: Mention names? I don't know if I can mention names. I don't know if I can remember really.

MEH: Do you think this was on both sides, or just one side?

GCJ: Well, I have a feeling, but I don't want to give a wrong impression. It's just a vague impression, that it was more the – what do you call it? the conservative faction? I don't know what to call it – that were doing this. But I don't know. I'm not too sure.

MEH: What do you think of the crisis – in the summer of 1944, what do you think the real issues were?

GCJ: Well, as far as I know, they were integration, and, and what is to be taught there, you know, aimed particularly at Eric Bentley and the influence of Fran de Graaff.

MEH: What do you mean by "the influence of Fran de Graaff"?

GCJ: Well, people thought she was a bad influence. I don't know why, but she – She did have a little group of special students, you know, hung around her. You know, like devo-, disciples or something like that. I don't know that she asked for that but she got it, and Jeanne Wacker and – boy, names are leaving me now. Names I really do know, but they're not coming. They'll come after you've gone. [LAUGHS]

MEH: Okay. But in the summer of '44, I mean essentially the integration issue had been at least resolved for the moment, even though not in a very generous way but by agreeing to admit one black woman.

GCJ: Yes. Just for the summer.

MEH: For the summer, right. So, the issue after that – do you think that if Barbara Anderson and Jeanne Wacker had not been arrested that summer, if that incident had not occurred, do you think that the college then would have mended wounds and gone on with its program?

GCJ: I had never thought that that was really so crucial. I think those issues were still there. That's what I would think. They were kind of scapegoats. I mean, they were somebody to suddenly pick on and jump on. What – They were, they were – Fran was blamed for that, was she, or – ?

MEH: I think she was held – She was held responsible for having let the girls hitchhike without – not having stopped them. But I think that it was a culmination of just a lot of things, like a lot of things in our lives that, you know, the event that triggers the explosion is just – a small part of the bigger crisis.

GCJ: Yeah. Well I would say this was.

MEH: What about – I mean, I get such conflicting impressions of Eric Bentley. Some people just adored him and some felt he was just a very negative influence in the community. Some people feel that Fran was just, that she was influenced in ways that were negative by Eric Bentley, by her devotion to him. What did you see his role in the community as being?

GCJ: What did I – ?

MEH: I'm just really – What do you think – What role do you think Eric played in the community as a teacher, or as a leader, or – ?

GCJ: Well, I didn't think it was a primary – I mean there were too many other primary figures there. Ted Dreier, for one. I didn't think so, but you're just asking my opinion, and I could have missed a point too. Now he may have been critical – I mean, there were people who came in and wanted to do things differently from the original sort of idealistic plan, right. So there were those always on the defense about that. Eric is a critic, anyway. [LAUGHS]

MEH: Right.

GCJ: He may have been critical. I just thought he was kind of brassy, bratty. I don't know what it was. But I wasn't comfortable with him.

MEH: So, when you left, what – To protest, what did you feel you were protesting?

GCJ: I was protesting – I guess particularly we were – The four student officers left. I guess I'll have to say it was over Fran de Graaff and Eric Bentley. We didn't feel that they should be asked to leave. Because the other issue was there, but it wasn't, at that point this way or that way.

MEH: What do you mean "the other issue" being – ?

GCJ: The integration. That was a very primary issue, in my mind at the time I was there. A lot of talk about it and a lot of discussion, and some intense emotion about it. But, you know, I keep having this feeling that I was so immature when I was there. I was just terribly immature.

MEH: But you were a teenager or—

GCJ: [LAUGHS] I was – Well, actually, I wasn't. I had been to college, I had been in New York working. What was I, twenty-one or – ? Twenty-one, I think. But you're asking these questions as though I should answer with a mature attitude, and I didn't really have it then. I was liberal. I was for equal rights of everyone. Let everyone be happy, let everyone –

MEH: Were you from a family that was very liberal. You said they were pacifist.

GCJ: Yes they were – Yeah. They were also – Yeah. I would say they were liberals. My father did a lot of – Well, this was the war issue, again, but a lot of marches in Washington. My mother went to some of those, too, I think. About the Vietnam War he was very active, writing letters to senators and representatives. Oh, yes, they voted for Norman Thomas when he ran, so they were –

MEH: So you were accustomed – You were comfortable with independent thought.

GCJ: Yeah. The racial issue, I don't know. You know I was born in Burma.

MEH: What was your father doing there?

GCJ: He was sent by a mission board, but he wasn't a missionary in the sense you might think. He taught at Dutson [PH] College in Rangoon. The board sent him there and he taught – I've forgotten, English, Sanskrit, maybe – English and Sanskrit. Anyway, I remember, maybe several things. But anyway I was only there two years, but that's a lot of – I was with dark-skinned people. Not African Negroes, but dark-skinned people. They were probably – I had amahs taking care of me, and so maybe – I've just never had a problem with that, you know, a feeling of any superiority to them, to a dark-skinned person. Certainly not.

MEH: How old were you when you came back to this country?
GCJ: Well, I was only two. But I'm just saying those first two years . . .
MEH: Were formative.
GCJ: Yeah. May have been. I don't know.
MEH: And then you lived where?
GCJ: Then I lived in Indiana for a while. My father taught in a college there, and then New Jersey.
MEH: So, Jimmie Jamieson, Edward Boardman Jamieson, came down to visit.
GCJ: Yes.
MEH: Sam Brown, or just the college. He'd already graduated. Was Sam still there?
GCJ: Oh, Sam was there till – Sam just left – Well Sam stayed even, I think, even after we left. Did he? I think so.
MEH: What did you do when you left the college?
GCJ: Well, this is when I went with Ruthie, Ruthie Miller, to New York, and we got this cold water flat, sixteen dollars a week. I went to Queens College for one semester, and I studied with Nicolai Graudan. I studied cello. Went to Queens College. I was planning to go ahead and get a degree. But then I was getting really interested in Jimmie Jamieson and vice versa, and so I didn't continue at Queens College. I got married.
MEH: What was he doing then?
GCJ: He was working at the Brattleboro Retreat. He was on his alternative service as a conscientious objector. He was for about a year before he got released, I think. Yeah.
MEH: So, you both were musicians, both interested in music.
GCJ: Yeah, but Jimmie was much broader than that. He was really interested in music, but he had a terrific literary mind, too. I enjoyed that.
**[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE 1, AUDIOTAPE 1;
SIDE 2, AUDIOTAPE 1 BEGINS]**
GCJ: Well, I mean, he loved jazz, too. Well, I mean that's music. He had worked through all these – e.e. cummings, have you ever read any e.e. cummings? Okay. Well, I thought that was quite a feat to have worked – figured out all of those. William Blake was one of his favorites. There was a while – when we first got this place, he had an unexplained illness. I think now I know what it was. But we got this place and had to be quiet. He was supposed to be quiet for a while. We just read and read and read. He knew Foster Damon there at Brown University. He was a Blake authority. He went to see him once, and he gave him a pass to the library so he could go to the Brown Library and get anything he wanted. It was just a great time in my reading. I wouldn't want to do that now, but at that time I enjoyed it. Well, he had – We'd been to New Mexico. After he was released, we took what you might call a honeymoon or something. We went to – At his mother's suggestion we went to stay in the house of someone she knew who was away, in Santa – In, just outside of Santa Fe. When we came back -- we had a long drive back. When we came back, he – They thought it was polio. He had a collapse, a nervous – a numbness and nervous kind of thing. They put him through all the tests. They didn't have the MRI then that they have now. I really think it was multiple

sclerosis. They did mention that as a possibility, but they seemed to have ruled out all the known neurological illnesses. One reason I think so is because my daughter has MS. She's not suffering, but she's doing a very good job with that. She's been able to function and work and she's not getting depressed. She has a very good attitude. But they do say it's not inherited but for some reason because she has it, I think –

MEH: [INAUDIBLE] I think I heard that he died very suddenly?

GCJ: Yeah, that had nothing to do with his neurological thing.

MEH: What was it, spinal meningitis or something like that?

GCJ: No. It was a heart attack.

MEH: Oh, a heart attack. I didn't realize that.

GCJ: Yeah, it was right here at home, just, just very traumatic, really. He was – You know, at Christmastime – he had a lot of relatives around Boston. They were somewhat – they're pretty well off. It was hard to them things, so he always made bread. He loved to make bread, and I made jam and we'd wrap them up, and we'd deliver them at Christmastime. But we hadn't gotten around to it. This was the last day of December, and we had a big basketful of bread, a laundry basket. It was a very bitter cold morning, but he was going – and he was going to take my son and my daughter – our son – and my daughter was going to stay here. They were out – It was a very cold morning, and the car wouldn't start. Or it was about noon time. They went out pushing the car. He came in and had a – He didn't feel well, and he sat down in the chair, and he had a pain in his arm. I knew that symptom and I thought – I called a doctor. I remember the doctor's office said, "Well he's got an office full of patients. He can't come." I said, almost hysterically—so I instinctively knew. I said, "If he can't come, get me someone who can." Well, he came. He was sort of a – He knew Jimmie very well through the church. Jimmie did the church choir. He did a lot of choral music. He came, and he ordered an ambulance, gave him a shot of something, morphine maybe, I don't know. I'm getting emotional just talking about it.

MEH: It was a long time ago.

GCJ: I don't like to review it that much, although I have. The 31st of December every year I think of this. Well anyway, he died before the ambulance came. Just, just like that. In other words, he was an active man going to Boston, and two hours later he was gone.

MEH: How old was he?

GCJ: Forty-two.

MEH: You had two children?

GCJ: Yes. I'm glad for that now.

MEH: I'm sure. What did you do professionally before his death? Did he teach or —

GCJ: Well he taught at – Well, after he got better from this neurological attack, he got a job at New Canaan Country School. We lived in New Canaan for five years. Then he got a little – Jimmie didn't like to work under people. I mean his son is the same way. It's funny. He wanted to be on his own, and he – We had this house, and I think he made some arrangement with his mother or father that if they would help us until he got on his feet or something like that maybe.

He came up here and he got several choral conducting jobs – small ones. He taught piano, and he taught at – I don't know just how soon he got but he had a job at Gordon School in Providence, which is a really nice, a very good school. So two days a week or something he'd go in there. But he just made piecemeal kind of.

MEH: Now were you working during this time? Were you taking care of kids?

GCJ: Well, I played in the Rhode Island Philharmonic for quite a few years, and that was kind of a part-time job in the sense that I had to be there evenings. Well, before I took my – Before he died and I took my teaching job at Rector School, they had children's concerts one morning, Tuesday mornings, and I had to go then. It was sometimes a problem with the babysitters, so I could go if he wasn't home. Evenings he was usually home, when I had to go, so we worked that out pretty well.

MEH: Going back to Black Mountain, are there particular memories that you have of events or people that are especially vivid now, or meaningful?

GCJ: Nothing I'm coming up with right now in a hurry.

MEH: What about the landscape?

GCJ: Oh, I loved it. Who didn't?

MEH: It was hard not to.

GCJ: Beautiful [INAUDIBLE].

MEH: Did you ever go into Asheville or Black Mountain?

GCJ: Oh yeah. Let's see, when did I go to Asheville? Well, we went into Black Mountain sometimes, just little groups of us for this and that. Asheville, I saw Porgy and Bess there, I remember. It must have just – Must have been its first – early performance. They wanted me – the music people like Jalo and Cohen anyway, I don't know whether Lowinsky was involved – to try out for a little North Carolina orchestra. I don't know if it was called All State or what.

MEH: Symphony. The State Orchestra.

GCJ: Oh, and I know, someone had come to the school and we had played a little something and I guess I had to go in there and audition. I remember going in for that. I remember that it was just a nightmare. I mean I wasn't up to it – that was all. They did Prokofiev, Classical Symphony. I hadn't played Prokofiev before. I wasn't that competent, really, to handle it, and they were sort of disappointed in what I was doing in sort of a sectional rehearsal, so I got asked not to come, not to do that. That was a big disappointment, but it was justified, I know. You know, really the highlights I think were that summer of the Music Institute.

MEH: Did you get to know Kolisch at all?

GCJ: Yeah. Marcel Dick. Saw quite a bit of him. He was a very congenial person, friendly with students. I went to open rehearsals. That is, before the concert when they were rehearsing they let us – anyone who wanted to come – sit in on rehearsals. I loved doing that. It was a good way to learn the work too, because they'd go back over passages. I became very fond of both the Graudans. We used to see each other socially in New York, with Jimmie too, and go out to dinner together sometimes, and things like that. So I made new friends anyway.

MEH: Did you ever get a college degree?

GCJ: Yes. Finally. I went to – After Jimmie died – I had not gotten the degree. You know, I had more credits than it took to get a degree, between New Jersey College and – They sent me a transcript from Black Mountain. I had too many credits. But I had to get the – I thought I'd better get that degree and get a little more prepared in my life. I looked at various places around here, and I really thought with two young kids—they were ten and thirteen—I couldn't cope here alone probably. If I lived in Providence, the tuition was very low at that time, very little. I'm sure it's big now, but – I'm amazed I had all this ability, but right after he died, as a matter of fact, my father came and stayed for a couple of months with me here. But I don't know where this energy came from, but I was able to go there and find an apartment. I found a very good one after looking at a number. It was in a big house on the east—over near Brown University—and it was owned by a professor of religions at Brown. He was renting out the first floor, and he and his family lived on the second floor. The top floor was rented to students. It was a very nice situation for me, and they were a nice family too. So I've forgotten how I got onto this subject. Oh. I went to Rhode Island College and lived in Rhode Island. So I got my degree. They made me take two years because I couldn't have their degree without two years of their college. So, I had to take two full years. I went to summer schools too. I majored in English literature.

MEH: That's interesting.

GCJ: They didn't have a music major there then. They do now. They have a big music department, but they didn't at that time. This was 1962.
[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: The school that you taught at, was it a private school?

GCJ: Yes. Called Rectory School. It's right next to a very well-known school, Comfort School. It's a – high school age.

MEH: What did you teach?

GCJ: I was a tutor, but especially – Things changed in later years, but I went esp- -- The school specialized in dyslexic children. You know what that is. Yeah. They're very bright, many of them. Usually. They can be very bright, but they have a reversal problem, and they have trouble reading, trouble writing sometimes. So, I was sort of specially trained by someone for this job, and that's what I did, with a certain – it's called Gillingham-Orton [Orton-Gillingham] System. But as I stayed – just more recently they were encouraging more general help. In the beginning the head of our department didn't want us to do any help with their homework. We were just supposed to work on what's called language training. But later it became more and more help with homework, help with homework, help with homework. I really became a general tutor toward the end. Most of them did have certain dyslexic problems. Not all of them but a lot of them, and you could spot that right away with the first dictation you gave the or the first time you had them read.

MEH: Is mirror writing related to dyslexia at all?

GCJ: I believe it is, yeah.

- MEH:** I've noticed in the school that kindergarten kids, quite a few of them do mirror writing.
- GCJ** Well, I understand that many of them outgrow that.
- MEH:** I don't see it in the older kids. I see it in just the very young kids.
- GCJ** I think it's often outgrown, and maybe it won't, maybe it isn't – This Dr. Orton discovered something about the brain. You know it's like being left-handed or right-handed. You know, my youngsters – Well, my youngsters were fifth grade through ninth. They'd read "was" – they'd misread "was" for "saw" and "saw" for "was" and that kind of reversal thing; b for p – You know, when I wrote reports – I would find myself, especially when I used a typewriter, not when I did it by hand – I would do N-I for I-N. Little – O-T for T-O. So, I guess I had a little bit too, maybe.
- MEH** We all do, because I switch letters. There's a point at which it becomes a problem that I guess it matters.
- GCJ** This woman, Margaret Russon, who was kind of a specialist in this, said that everyone has a little bit, it's a matter of degree.
- MEH:** Let's look at some of these things over here, and see what memories they may trigger.
- GCJ** Well this is largely Jimmie's stuff, earlier. That's his thesis.
- MEH:** You were saying it was his thesis which he wrote for – was it Jalowetz's – 1942.
- GCJ** Now a lot of these things were just little things that I just thought might be of no interest at all, but I didn't know. Let's see, I'll have to get my glasses when I read all this stuff, especially with – There are some programs, a few programs, from Steuermann's, one of Steuermann's recitals.
- MEH:** [READING] Memorandum to Members of the Board, Fellows, The Status of Present Faculty Appointments, War Production Board. This is the person I'm going to go see in Providence, Hampton Duxbury.
- GCJ:** Oh.
- MEH:** [INAUDIBLE]
- GCJ** Now, you may take any of these you want. I'm not – At this point in my life I have to disperse things.
- MEH:** Well, before I leave, why don't we talk about possible places that I might send them because I myself do not collect original documents. But I just took – The person I just interviewed in Hartford just gave me a book. He said, "It's going to be thrown out when I die." It was a book that Bob Wunsch had written and had autographed to him, and so I –
- GCJ** Oh. I didn't know he wrote books.
- MEH** He co-authored a book on writing, teaching writing. Then he had some photographs that he had no idea – but he said, "We're going to dig them up." So, we'll talk about possibilities about where this stuff can go. But I myself am not an archive, so, you know, it needs to go to an archive. An interesting collection of just miscellaneous documents that he decided to save. We'll put it here.
- GCJ:** Well I'm not throwing – I haven't thrown them out, but I'm not trying to hang onto them. Oh, that's just a program, probably Saturday – You asked how we

entertained ourselves. We gave concerts and things like that [LAUGHS], that's what we did. Right. I just realized here's something I played in. We had – We played trios. Trudi Straus was the violinist and so we played quite a few trios there.

MEH: Did you take any courses with her?

GCJ Yes, I took German with her, and that's an episode. I sat in that little porch. They had the little house right near the Dining Hall. I sat on that little porch. Trudi loved cats. Talking about cats. something kept biting my ankles. I realized later it was fleas [LAUGHS]. So, I had to get bitten by fleas to go take my German lesson. It was a tutorial lesson.

MEH: It really is amazing when you think of undergraduate classes today that so many things were, you know, classes, if they weren't tutorials, five or six students. What a difference. You had your own study in the Studies Building?

GCJ I had my own study, yes.

MEH: Do you remember how you decorated it, or set it up?

GCJ Well, I remember that I had no desk, and there was a boy, Lindsay Riley [PH], who was a student at divinity school in Nashville, I think. I'm not sure. He was spastic. I knew him from my hometown, and he had gone to Rutgers. I used to see him there sometimes. It's unfortunate because he, at that age, you know, had a real – was drawn to me in a way I wasn't drawn to him. It's hard to be drawn to a spastic, you know. But, you know – But anyway, he came to see me, and he wanted to help me build a desk. He was very clever. It was so hard for him to handle tools and things, but he had shown me once a model ship he had made with all the little railings and everything. Well, anyway, I remember that we got some lumber from someplace, and we put together that desk which I used the whole time I was there. I don't remember. I didn't do a lot of fancy decorating. I know some people did. I had a kind of a couch, and I don't remember – That may have been just a board with a mattress on top. I've forgotten. But it was very simple. That's all I can say. Those are just papers that he did.

MEH: It's his Senior Division examination.

GCJ Oh, that's his Senior Division, okay. I did do the Senior Divisions, and I remember once that's when Eric Bentley rather floored me because I – I had a terrible time with self -esteem. In fact, I know a lot of women who have that problem. I've had to work on that a great deal. I don't care anymore. I've found myself enough so I don't care what anyone else thinks, but there were times when I needed support from other – from outside. Well, I remember Eric Bentley complimented me on my Senior Division exam and I was really – Because I think I was a little intimidated by this great knowledge and everything. Well, there's a program that they had. A lot of programs here. I guess Jimmie had to write – Or maybe – Was that at Black –

MEH It's in New York [OVERTALK]

GCJ That's right. I was looking at these a long time ago. But Jimmie apparently was asked to write reviews of these concerts as part of his work, so these are reviews he wrote.

MEH: The review and the concert.

GCJ He went to the – So I don't know if those are of interest, but there are some programs that happened at Black Mountain.

MEH: These really are concerts from other places that he reviewed.

GCJ These are – Yeah, so I don't know. These are all concerts. We had these long Christmas vacations, and we were supposed to do certain projects then. In fact, the first year when I was there during my five week or whatever it was vacation, I studied with – I took lessons with a teacher I had been working with before. I hadn't met Nicolai Graudan yet. You're getting sleepy.

MEH: That's okay.

GCJ: You just say when you want to stop.

MEH: I will.

GCJ: Okay, I doubt if you want those, but they're just an exercise.

MEH: It's not a matter of what I want. I think they're documents and they can go into an archive, and who knows who else, you know, who might find them useful. It's interesting that he saved them.

GCJ That we saved them?

MEH: That he – Yeah, that he saved them, and you then saved them, of course. John Gabriel Borkman. This is the review of the Black Mountain performance. This would really be interesting to read.

GCJ: Okay, and there's that "To Edward Steuermann." He was there during the Summer Music Institute. These are all Senior Divisions, I think.

MEH: I wonder whose comments here. Is that Jimmie's – Is that his handwriting, or somebody else's?

GCJ Someone else's and I daresay it's Jalowetz's, because I think he worked a lot with Jalowetz, and it looks a little bit like the handwriting that I saw here and there in his thesis that I'm sure [OVERTALK]. I'm looking for some more of those programs. Some of these are financial statements. I didn't know if they would interest you. Music Institute Budget – Music Institute.

MEH Did he have a sister – He didn't have a sister or brother who went to Black Mountain, did he?

GCJ: Normie apparently went there. I didn't realize – His name is in your list there.

MEH: That was his brother?

GCJ: Norman. I don't think he was there very long, because I've known Normie – I still see him once in a while.

MEH: Yeah, I have the dates at home that he was there. But yeah, I thought I remembered.

GCI: I don't think he was there very long, but he did meet Nicky and I don't remember what her maiden was – she married. I know Nicky went to Black Mountain.

MEH: His wife? Hmm. I didn't realize that. Is he still living?

GCJ Yes, they are.

MEH: I'll have to check my list and see if I still have their names.

GCJ I had a Christmas letter from them, and quite a while ago my son and I went up to see them in the summer. Two summers we went up to see them. It's about a five hour drive, and I'm not willing to do it very often.

MEH: Are they outside of Bo- -- Where are they?

- GCJ:** They were in Long Island, but they're living in Maine – Brunswick. They have a summer place on a lake there, near Brunswick. Yeah.
- MEH:** The Jamieson family, was that a well-to-do family in Boston, or just an old family, or neither?
- GCJ:** They were well-off, Jimmie's family. I don't know if -- Well, there were other Jamiesons, too. Marian Jamieson. Jimmie's family was well-off, not well-to-do in a big way like big way. But she gave a lot of money here and there. I bet she gave a lot to Black Mountain.
- MEH:** That's what I was thinking.
- GCJ:** [OVERTALK] I wouldn't be surprised.
- MEH:** I don't know that she gave tremendous amounts, but I know that she – his mother – contributed.
- GCJ:** Yes. They were well-to-do but not fabulously rich. That's the way I would phrase it.
- MEH:** What did his father do?
- GCJ:** He was in the textile industry.
- MEH:** That's interesting. The budget for the Summer Music Institute actually was – that's receipts, expected receipts. Estimated expenses were \$5,750. [LAUGHS] That was a lot of money back then, actually.
- GCJ:** I know. These are still a lot of the Senior Division examination. Well, what's that – Oh, I see I haven't gotten down there yet.
- MEH:** Why don't I put these with the –
- GCJ:** More reviews. Well that's just – I'm not reading it much because I've got to go get my glasses if I'm going to.
- MEH:** Preliminary notice about students checking out end of quarter.
- GCJ:** More budgets.
- MEH:** Something from Ted Dreier. More budgets.
- GCJ:** Okay, I remember reading this one. Whenever I went through these before, it was three or four years ago.
- MEH:** I've seen this before. I have the notes who this was from somewhere at home. P.M. Magazine.
- GCJ:** Jalowetz. There's more here than I thought.
- MEH:** There's this Friends Magazine article.
- GCJ:** The first Music Institute program.
- MEH:** From that summer?
- GCJ:** Some of these mine obviously, because their dates are later than his.
- MEH:** Catalogues.
- GCJ:** Concert, First Music Institute. Oh yes. This is drama, I think. Bury the Dead. Drama. Building project. Nice pictures of the building project.
- MEH:** Some of these flyers were really very elegant that they did.
- GCJ:** Some of these are very nice, and I don't know if someone has them someplace or not. There's the Art Institute.
- [END OF SIDE 2, AUDIOTAPE 1]**
- GCJ:** That's sort of interesting. "Black Mountain College: Education in a Self-governing Community."

MEH: This was the thing at the Dalton School. There's another copy of that same program that's not damaged like this one.

GCJ: I seem to have quite a few copies of this. All the same thing I think.

MEH: That one's different.

GCJ: Oh, yeah. Work camp.

MEH: It's the Work Camp. But I think these two are alike. But that one got – chomped out of.

GCJ: Oh, well, a mouse had gotten into the box. I took out quite a bit that was really destroyed. They did that once – I have a music chest upstairs there. A mouse got in and made a nice nest out of my music. Several copies of this "Education in a Self-governing Community." "Aims of Black Mountain College." Let me see who wrote this.

MEH: It probably was just a general statement that was not particularly authored.

GCJ: Repeats of that too. This music. Didn't Surette give quite a bit of the music?

MEH: He gave his library to the college.

GCJ: That's interesting. Kenyon College. I went there and Jimmie went there too. Got some time off. He was there part of the time anyway.

MEH: How would you compare that to the summer at Black Mountain – the summer of 1944?

GCJ: Oh, it was different. It was different. It wasn't the same small community for one thing. It was good but nothing like the spirit we had. It was a very special thing.

MEH: What do you think were the factors that contributed to the differences?

CGJ: Well, it wasn't the same small community. I think the college was going on the same time. There were other people there. Music or coaching was just as good and concerts were good. That was the summer though that the atom bomb fell. Jimmie was there and everyone was rejoicing. Jimmie and I could both only think how tragic it was for all those people. We just – they cancelled concerts. The bells rang all night. Some church bells kept gonging all night. I remember we went to bed and we woke up with such a start at some siren or something that went off we bumped our heads together and it really hurt.

MEH: Why did the sirens go off in relation to the dropping of the bomb?

CGJ: Well, just rejoicing, rejoicing, rejoicing. The war was over.

MEH: The war was over. Ok.

CGJ: The war is over.

MEH: [REFERRING TO DOCUMENT] John Allcott was my thesis advisor at Chapel Hill.

CGJ: Oh, really.

MEH: Really sweet, fine man.

CGJ: Does that interest you really?

MEH: It describes his visit to Black Mountain which in terms of –

CGJ: That someone might use.

MEH: It should be part of the archive. He taught art at Chapel Hill. He was a forward thinking person.

CGJ: You were at Chapel Hill?

MEH: That's where I did my master's and where I first heard about Black Mountain and became curious.

CGJ: The president of the student council, Black Mountain [REFERRING TO DOCUMENT]

MEH: I won't read all of this now. Before I turn this off, looking at this *Friends* article in 1942 I was thinking – do you remember with whom you shared a room in the lodge?

CGJ: At the time I was there it varied. The first time was Dody – what was her name.

MEH: Dody Harrison.

CGJ: Yes. I don't think you have in your list Margaret Strauss at all. Apparently she not –

MEH: Do you know what? She was one of the people I had a reference to but I was not sure whether she had been there or not.

CGJ: She was a friend of mine and she came. I've forgotten how long she stayed.

MEH: But she did come.

CGJ: She came. I met her at New Jersey College and at that time she had been sent to this country from Germany because of the persecution. Her parents were planning to follow. They had some kind of a place for her – foster parents to take her. I met them. We became very close friends. Then – I guess I urged her to come to Black Mountain after she got out of New Jersey College. She was a mathematician. She really did not have much money, but I guess her foster parents – Oh, I know. First of all, her parents – the letters – she didn't hear from them. She couldn't get in touch with them. This kept going on and on. They must have been gassed. That's all. They just disappeared. She told me much later that she had gone back to Germany, tried to trace them. There wasn't a trace. That was very sad. But at any rate, she did come to Black Mountain for a while. They let her teach math a little bit. She was a good mathematician. She was part student and part assistant or something like that.

MEH: You looked in the student – Did you look in the faculty?

GCJ: Oh, maybe not. But she didn't stay very long. But she was my roommate.

MEH: Do you know where she is now?

GCJ: No, I've lost touch with her. I'm sorry.

MEH: I seem to remember her name as one of those people that to her – there was a reference to a Margaret Strauss, but I couldn't really pin down whether she had come or whether she just applied or whatever.

GCJ: She was there for a short time but I don't remember how long/

MEH: That's significant.

GCJ: Irrelevant remarks.

[INTERVIEW WITH CONSTANCE SPENCER FOLLOWS THIS POINT ON GWENDOLYN CURRIER JAMIESON INTERVIEW. JAMIESON INTERVIEW CONTINUES ON AUDIOTAPE 2 THE FOLLOWING MORNING.]

MEH: You were saying that you went back to visit?

GCJ: Jimmie and I went to a music, summer music institute in Tennessee, and on the way back we stopped at Black Mountain to visit. This is when Roman was about two years old, because I remember we took him and he was kind of a problem on that long car trip. Too bouncy. But – just then Merce Cunningham

and John Cage were giving a – they gave a little reci-, little program, which we saw. We saw them there.

MEH: Did he play the prepared piano for that one? Do you remember?

GCJ: No, I don't. I remember something I heard—a symphony or something for twelve radios? You want to try one of these?

MEH: Oh, this is a big breakfast. Maybe a small piece.

GCJ: You want to take one with you to munch in the car if you're hungry?

MEH: I'll do that. Later today, that might be a good thing to do. This is a lot of breakfast for me. It's good. I'm a big oatmeal – I put cinnamon and honey on my oatmeal. Eat it in the morning.

GCJ: I could have offered you honey.

MEH: No, brown sugar's fine.

GCJ: Here's a bag you can put your score –

MEH: Do you think that, as an adult, you would have wanted to be part – I mean, much later, you would have wanted to be part of a community like Black Mountain?

GCJ: I was very much interested in community living before I went to Black Mountain. I mentioned that I lived in something called the Harlem Ashram. That was a little community, and there were people there who were trying to help the young people in Harlem. Then I established with some others a little what we called a co-op. We found an apartment and rented it, six of us, and each one – there was enough space so we each had some little, one little private room to go to. We kind of shared our life. It wasn't planned as a cooperative, but we had to be cooperative. Then I got interested in cooperative communities generally. After Jimmie and I got this place, and I began getting really rather restless. We didn't have children for five years, and he was so-called recuperating and all of this. I felt too isolated here, especially as I'm an introverted type, and I don't go out looking for society. It has to be there in my life. I thought about that when I retired. I said, "Well, here I have the students, I have the faculty, I have people all day. When I retire, am I going to have that?" But I remember urging him – I got several things about different communities – urging him for us to go into one of those communities. So I assume, to answer your question, I would have liked to have been there. Right now I don't know if I would choose community living, but I think previously I liked the idea of living with other people in a cooperative set-up. Of course, they all run into problems. You know, even the famous string quartets where four people have to work together so much. They run into personality problems. It's just human nature, I guess.

MEH: Did you take courses other than – Who did you take courses with, other than music, at Black Mountain?

GCJ: I took Straus's called "World Psychology."

MEH: How was that?

GCJ: I never knew quite what it was, but I know they questioned me about it when I went to Rhode Island College, and it was on my transcript. It was more of a philosophy – it was more his own philosophy, I think. I think I was attracted to it

because of the word “psychology.” But as I remember it was more philosophy, I think. I think it was. I took chemistry with Hansgirg.

MEH: What was Hansgirg like?

GCJ: Oh, he was a very sweet man, but not, not really understanding of what we were doing at Black Mountain at all. He didn't cause trouble, but I think his heart wasn't in it particularly. But he seemed to like the students. One time we had a birthday – three of us had birthdays in the same week, and he and his wife had us to their house for a supper together. He always used to say – I got so mad about this because I had a hard time with some of those things in chemistry—and he would always say “But eet ees so eeasy! Eet ees so eeasy.” [LAUGHS] I didn't want to hear that anymore. What else did I take? I must have taken more than that – quite a few music courses.

MEH: Take any literature?

GCJ: I didn't take – With Ken Kurtz? Did anyone else teach literature? I took German, of course.

MEH: With –

GCJ: With Trude Straus, a tutorial. I had had German. I had two years of it at New Jersey College and I'd had high school German. I don't know why I went into German so strongly, but – So I decided to continue, and I was into reading real German literature by that time.

MEH: I have a lot of music friends, musician friends, who took German [OVERTALK]

GCJ: I never learned to speak either German or French. I only learned it academically. But I had a chance. I heard a lot of German around there, because the people from Germany would speak in German to each other every once in a while. I never picked it up though. I don't think I have a good ear for languages. It's strange. Some people seem to and some don't.

MEH: It's a gift.

GCJ: So German, Chemistry. I was there two years. I must have taken a lot more besides music. I don't remember taking literature, although I did later, at Rhode Island College. I majored in literature. I have my transcript. Do you want to see it? I think I have it.

MEH: I was going to ask you did Rhode Island accept your credits?

GCJ: Well, what they said was “You have too many credits. You have to be here two years and you have too many credits,” so they started slashing, slashing, and slashing – just cut a lot out.

MEH: So they cut you down to two years of already – they essentially gave you two years credit.

GCJ: Yeah. I'd had two years at New Jersey College that were quite recognized, okay?

MEH: Did you get that from the State Archive, or from Black Mountain?

GCJ: Old book selling material (?). I got this from – Oh, I got it from Black Mountain, I guess. Must have.

MEH: Because Black Mountain would have still been in operation then.

GCJ: Oh, yeah. Oh, that's right, no, they wouldn't, would they. That was 196_?

MEH: It would have been the State Archive if that's the case.

GCJ: Well, I got one from someplace. This is Queens College. Willimantic State College.

MEH: You took eukinetics with Elsa Kahl?

GCJ: Yeah. She called it eukinetics, and it was –

MEH: What was that like?

GCJ: It was like getting ready for modern dance, I think. I remember that my muscles were so sore after working with her. It was just terrible. But it was learning – Well, I remember we had to learn to fall this way, and we had to learn – things that you would use in a dance. Eukinetics means body training, I think. Acoustics was really a science course.

MEH: Who taught that?

GCJ: Hansgirg.

MEH: Hansgirg, [AFFIRMATIVE]

GCJ: And I learned – it was quite interesting to me. I really learned quite a bit there. Classical Symphony, Music History, Music History, Bach Seminar, Counterpoint, Musical Form. See, I did a lot of music. Chamber Music. Literature for Piano and Cello. Well yeah, they put that down as a course. Well that's because, you know, Jalowetz played sonatas with me, and they gave me credit as a course, but it was in a way. It was just that I didn't have to take exams, [LAUGHS] and bone up and – I loved that not having exams there.

MEH: How do you think that affected your learning process?

GCJ: I just wanted to learn, so it didn't – I didn't the exam to make me learn this. Of course, exam is one way for a teacher to find out how much the student is learning, I suppose. But I just hate these tests all the time, and of course I got them when I got to Rhode Island College all the time: term papers and exams. Anyway, yeah, I loved that freedom from the tests. I think – it seems to me that Lowinsky wanted to give us exams, and there was some little discussion over that because it wasn't in the tradition. I don't quite remember how that worked out. I got credit for Orchestra and cello lessons. Now what would that – How did that Orchestra [INAUDIBLE]

MEH: Small orchestra.

GCJ: Well maybe that's all I took. I have a feeling that some of this was cut out too by Queens probably.

MEH: Probably at Rhode Island they accepted the credits that Queens had accepted.

GCJ: Mmmm. [UNINTEL]

[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE 1, TAPE 2; SIDE 2 UNRECORDED]
[END OF INTERVIEW]
[END OF TRANSCRIPT]