Interviewee: BASIL AND MARTHA DAVIS KING
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
Location: Brooklyn, New York
Date: April 27, 1997 and July 6, 1997
Media: Audiocassettes 1 (April)
Audio cassettes 2/Videocassettes 2 (July)
Interview no. : 77
Transcription: Ellen Dissanayake, October 21-23, 2001. Transcription completed and corrected by MEH, June 2015-January 2016.

[The interview was started on April 27, 1997. It was discontinued because of technical difficulties with the video recorder. It was resumed on July 6, 1997. The April 27 section is on audiotape only.]

[BEGINNING OF APRIL 27 INTERVIEW.
[BEGINNING OF AUDIO TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

MEH: Martha and Basil. Martha how did you come to be at Black Mountain College?

MDK: Quite accidentally. I only went for the summer. Let's see. There are sort of two convergent stories. I found out about Black Mountain because I had run into the Black Mountain Review in the Bull's Head Bookstore and had been very puzzled by the issue that I read and very excited by it. It was the one that had Creeley's essay about Franz Kline in it and a number of other things. It was also very peculiar as a North Carolinian. What's this Black Mountain College in North Carolina? I've never heard of it. And why is there a Black Mountain Review that's printed in Majorca Spain? Which I couldn't pronounce at the time anyway. But the other reason was I had applied to -- for a job as a dancer in the outdoor drama at Cherokee. And at that time they didn't hire any of the local women to be Indian dancers in the outdoor drama. I was hired to be – well, actually if you worked there, you usually were a white settler in the first act and an Indian in the other two acts. And mostly they were

recruiting out of the drama department. And I had been hanging around the drama department from the time I was twelve. And they didn't know when they hired me that I wasn't eighteen. And when they found out, they withdrew the hiring because they had had some problems with young girls. Blah, blah, blah. And they weren't going to be responsible for me. So there I was unhired. And it was March and I was desperate to figure out some way to get out of town for the summer. So I wrote to Black Mountain College and found out they had a summer school and did they have a work-study program? Did they have this and did they have that. And I got back a package of stuff, very outdated. I think it was 1955. But my father knew about it he said. But he had a lot of very out-of-date information too. All about Alfred Kazin. At any rate I went because I wanted to have something to do. And I got a very cryptic letter from Charles. You know, I kept pressing, "Well, how much is this going to cost? And can I have a part-time job in the town of Black Mountain? Is there a work-study program? I don't have any money." And he sent me a postcard that said, "Come with what money you have in hand and what you are used to for cooking." So, the money I had in hand was I think, minus my bus fare, something like $38 and what I was used to for cooking was my mother. So, I didn't do that. But I did go. That's how I got there.

MEH: Did your father have any objection to this at all?

MDK: No. He only objected at the end of the summer when I said I wanted to go back, and I didn't want to go to the University of North Carolina. I wanted to continue at Black Mountain.

MEH: So, for a summer thing it was okay.

MDK: Yeah. Actually they came by, my parents and my little brother. They were on their way to the West Coast in the middle of the summer, and they had decided to drive and they stopped. I don't know whether they were on their way are or on their way back. But they were pretty horrified at what they saw. I think they arrived when the truck had broken down. But the place was broken down.

MEH: What was your first impression of the college?

MDK: Well, you know being from the South, at my age, you're kind of used to places that were pretty broken down. The poverty didn't horrify me. But it looked like – there was a quality of a ghost town to it. There were unused places. The lower school was no longer the property of the school at that point, but it wasn't being used by anybody else. So there were all those buildings that were empty. It was a remnant. And I wasn't too sure what I thought about it. I mean, I was fascinated to spend hours in the library digging around for the old copies of Liberation Magazine and things that I didn't know anything about. And I was certainly bowled over by the intensity of some of the people I met, and the thought did occur to me that I was meeting people who were important to my life in a way that nobody I had been in touch with before was. So, I was very taken with it, and I kind of took in a lot of what of its peculiarities without thinking about them too much.

MEH: Basil, how did you come to be at Black Mountain?

MDK: Also accidental really. Not quite as accidental as mine.

BK: Well, I, you know – I was having a great deal of trouble with my parents, and I wasn't living with them. So I was by the age of fourteen very much almost on my own. And it turned me into something of a juvenile delinquent. And I was going to a very, very good high school in Detroit as you know because other Black Mountain people had been there. Cass Tech. But, a sideline, two years ago I finally saw Mrs. Coho again. Mrs. Coho, Jorge knows her. Jerry knows her. Etcetera, etcetera. She was one of those incredible teachers and women who touched everybody. I mean, she just touched everybody that she ever came in contact with. And, in fact, when I got in touch with her, because it turns out Cass Tech has this revolving thing. Every two years they have a reunion. Well, two years ago was the first time I got invited to the reunion, even though I didn't graduate, but I was going for the first time for my first reading tour to Europe. So, I wasn't going to be able to be there. But one of the other faculty, ex-faculty, gave me her phone number. And I phoned her up. I hadn't seen the woman since I was sixteen years old. At the time I was approaching sixty. Okay. And nice greetings, and then she said, "Well, what are you doing, Baz?" And I said, "I became an artist, Blossom." That's her first name. And she said, "Oh, honey, you were always an artist." Okay. But I – anyway, I became a problem to myself and everybody else. I was asked to leave Cass Tech. And I didn't want to go to any other high school. And I didn't know what I was going to do. I wrote to eighteen, nineteen different art schools and sent little portfolios. I got back, "As soon as you graduate high school, apply." You know, they had no SAT's at the time.

MDK: There were GED's.

BK: What's the GED's?

MDK: You couldn't go and take a test.

BK: I couldn't go and take a test. But, anyway, so the thing was, one of the faculty strangely enough, Donald Thrall, had been a student at Black Mountain under Albers, and he had also given us at school a grounding in Albers that was almost ludicrous because when things started becoming the Minimal world –

MDK: It wasn't ludicrous. It was very thorough.

BK: It was ludicrous that it was so early. That it was in high school. The thing was I didn't ask Donald Thrall about Black Mountain. I didn't even know about Black Mountain. I found Black Mountain in the main library in Detroit in a magazine. And I can't even remember if it was – it wasn't House & Gardens. But it was something that had --

MDK: A mainstream magazine. Vogue. Or something.

BK: No, no, baby. God knows what it was. This place in North Carolina. Now, what had also happened in the meantime was one of the things that I was doing, I was already painting. And I was going to Saturday morning classes at the Detroit Museum, and one Saturday I walked up the stairs. I went past the Diego Rivera, turned right, went up the stairs and turned the last and walked in and saw a Jackson Pollock. And, I tell you, it was like – I've written about that. It's in the Mirage. Honest to God, it was like somebody hit me with a fucking bolt. I mean, and I'd never seen anything like it, and I immediately loved it. I mean, it wasn't even a question. I walked over to Cyril Miles [PH],

one of the teachers, and I said, “What’s this all about?” She said, “Don’t worry about it. It’s a passing fad.” But I – it kind of glued in my head. And I couldn’t find out any – I could find out anything else. But, anyway, so, when Black Mountain came along, I wrote. Like Martha, I wrote. But on my letter, and I think you even printed it. You have it. I literally wrote and I said, “I’ve written to eighteen schools, and I’m this and I’m that.” And they said, “Come for an interview.” So I went for an interview. My mother came with me. Took the bus down to Asheville, took the taxi out to Black Mountain, and they put on this genteel European tea party. They dragged out their old linen and their cups and their saucers and their teapot. I mean, they made this – you know, and her being English, they sat down and we had tea.

MDK: This was in 19- either ‘51 or ‘52. You and I argue about it. [OVERTALK]

BK: No, I know. No, no. It was ’51.

MDK: It must of been ‘51.

BK: It was 51. I mean, it’s silly. I’ve thought about that since that last time –

MDK: There was a big difference in the school between’51 and –

BK: ’52.

MDK: Huge.

BK: Well, the whatch-you-call-it. The dining hall was going. This was open. That was open. There were even some students and faculty. You know, Lou Harrison coming up now. I mean, I saw the tail end of Lou. He told me not to stay. I mean, I didn’t see him that much. All I knew – all I remember is this very gangly, very sad-looking man. And the second or third time I said hello to

him, and we were walking down the path. He said, “Don’t stay here. It’s like New York. It’s no good.”

[BEGINNING OF JULY 6 INTERVIEW.
[BEGINNING OF AUDIO TAPE 1, SIDE 1 AND VIDEOTAPE 1.]

MEH: [IRRELEVANT PRE-INTERVIEW REMARKS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

BK: We're on the third floor of 326A 4th Street, Brooklyn 11215, and this is – this room here is my drawing and writing room. I paint in the front room. I store everything at Crozier's on 22nd Street in Manhattan, because I haven't got enough room to store three hundred paintings. So everything is there. And storage costs as much as the house.

MEH: I'm sure it does.

BK: Okay? You know, between the two, we have two houses, but one is in Rhode Island. [LAUGHS]

MDK: It has a rotten view! [LAUGHS]

BK: Oh, well.

MEH: Oh well.

MDK: At least, it's rodent proof and air-conditioned.

BK: Well, it has a show-room. It's very, very convenient.

MDK: My study's downstairs on the second floor.

MEH: Where you write.

MDK: Where I write, yes.

BK: And she does work for MS there, too.

MEH: Martha, you're working full-time now?

MDK: I work full-time for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. I run their publications program, which means editing the magazine basically and editing patient booklets and doing annual reports, all kinds of publications, but the main one's a magazine.

MEH: Do you do that from here, or do you go into the office?

MDK: I go to the office, but I work a day a week at home, and I might even increase that to two. As soon as I get my new assistant whipped into shape. [LAUGHS]

MEH: Is this Basil?

MDK: No, no, no. [LAUGHTER]

BK: I'm finally going to have an occupation.

MEH: [LAUGHTER] [OVERTALK] Well, I always say that the half-semester of Personal Typing I took in high school was the only course that ever helped me earn my living.

MDK: I sometimes wonder if I hadn't done that, if I hadn't taken a course – and I used to take the bus over to Durham, and I went to a little business school in Durham. It was a dreary place in those days. You remember it. It smelled like cigarette (OVERTALK). If I hadn't done that, I might have been sort of forced to live by my wits a little bit more and not just sort of automatically gone and gotten, you know, a typing job when things were – Mind you, I had a number of pretty peculiar jobs, coming out of that. Did you ever go temporary? Did you ever do temps?

MEH: Yes.

MDK: I had the strangest experiences and getting weird jobs that came up working temps.

MEH: So you never know. So anyway where were we? Basil, you said [OVERTALK].

BK: We were just at the point that I had got to Black Mountain, because I remember that – that I had literally just got there. And you had also told her why – how and why you had gone, for the summer. Yeah. Yeah.

MEH: Martha, I know Basil is not going to repeat himself. What about you? Would you repeat what you remember about how you got there?

MDK: [OVERTALK] To tell you the truth, I'm not sure. He probably knows what I said better than I do.

MEH: That's what we should do. You should tell me how he got there and he should tell me how you got there and that would –

BK: That would be very hard.

MEH: Yes it would. Let's, okay –

BK: Martha got there because she saw – In a bookstore, she saw the Black Mountain Review.

MDK: Bull's Head Bookstore carried it.

MEH: Martha, you had graduated from high school at that point.

MDK: I had graduated from high school, yeah.

MEH: Had you already been in Durham to take typing?

MDK: Good question. I don't think so.

BK: No, you told me you did that after you came back from Black Mountain.

MDK: I did. Yeah, I did that after I came back from Black Mountain. There was a little contretemps between myself and my parents about what I would continue to do. And I think the upshot of it was that I should take, I should take typing. [LAUGHTER] I think my parents thought if they forced me to do that, that I would, that I would sort of see the light and go back to college, which they conceived of as the University of North Carolina. But I did that and then I got a job in the medical library at the university and saved up my money and fled.

MEH: To Cali –

MDK: To California. By that time the college was closed, but I had heard that a large contingent of people from the college had gone out West following Duncan, because of their involvement in a play that he had written, the Medea play. And he had written it as people were rehearsing it. You probably know some of this. Actually, I didn't know Basil at that time. That he was in it.

MEH: Was it the summer of '55 or the summer of '56 that you were there?

MDK: It would have been '55.

MEH: '55, okay.

BK: I wasn't there that summer.

MEH: You were really back – Right. You were really back then for a year in Chapel Hill.

MDK: About a year, yeah, between typing school and Durham, and working at the medical library. I think I left the following spring. When I got out to San Francisco – look things up in a – I wasn't in touch with anybody directly. [OVERTALK] Because I'd broken up with Jerry. What?

MEH: Did you know anyone – Oh, that's right, I forgot about Jerry.

MDK: I had broken up with Jerry. So it sort of took a little while to kind of make connections. There was a reading at the Six Gallery of Duncan and Spicer, and I didn't know either of them but I went. And it was a great reading. I was really excited. And I was too shy to sort of go up and say, you know, "I went to Black Mountain. Can I hang around with you?" [LAUGHS]I thought that wasn't going to work. But then not too long after that I saw a notice in the – what's the name? Ferlingetti's bookstore –City Lights – that said there was a reading of the Magic, Magic Workshop that Jack Spicer had been running. Jack Spicer's Magic Workshop. And it had a whole list of names, one of which was probably Basil's, because you were in it, right?

BK: No.

MDK: You weren't in it? You were just – you just went around for the party? But one of the names was Joe Dunn. And I'm sure that was the same Joe Dunn. So I went. And that's when I really connected, because I <u>did</u> know Joe at Black Mountain, and so then it was like, "Oh, you're here." And so then it was like [CLAPS], and So & So, and So and So & So, and we all went out to a Chinese restaurant afterwards. And everybody

in the Magic Workshop had been, and more people – because you weren't in it – had been out to Stinson Beach somewhere.

BK: No, Bolinas.

MDK: Bolinas? To a long extended exhausting party. And that's when I met Basil. There he was! [LAUGHTER] He was wearing a pair of those mirrored sunglasses that were very popular back then except one frame was missing, and there was a very post-party eye, hanging out of that. [LAUGHTER]

MEH: So you arrived after the party – [OVERTALK]

MDK: Carolyn and Joe were still married, and for some reason Carolyn had thought that I would get along with Baz. And so she made a big point of introducing us.

MEH: [TURNING OFF MUSIC AND IRRELEVANT REMARKS]

BK: I just keep it on all the time. Because –

MDK: Because you keep it on all the time.

BK: I just keep in on all the time.

MEH: It's company.

BK: Yeah, it is. Exactly.

MEH: Actually, I do the same. I keep the stereo on just for company.

BK: Yeah, exactly. When you're here all day by yourself. [OVERTALK]

MDK: Kind of a low key, all-classical station, and you really, the music is very rarely very interesting, so it's not going to distract you. [LAUGHTER]

We used to keep this – [BREAK IN VIDEO RECORDING] the jazz station and we decided it was too demanding.

BK: Even country music.

MDK: That good old Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century classical.

MEH: It's just there. I've talked to several people who do the exact same thing.

BK: Sometimes I have three radios going in the house. All on the same station so that as I go up –

MDK: All on the same station.

BK: All on the same station so as I go up I hear the same material. I hear the same nocturnal stuff.

MEH: So, Basil, you had gone from Black Mountain directly to San Francisco.

BK: Yeah. When Black Mountain closed, I had thought about going back to New York and Charles told me, no. Literally told me no. I didn't – I was in the Medea play on and off. Duncan kept writing me in and writing me out as was our relationship. I was going to come back here, but Charles literally said, "Don't go." I mean, literally, "Don't go because [VIDEO RESUMES.] you'll get lost." He said, "You'll get taken up, and he said "Quite frank– " What he actually said was, he said, "You'll find yourself one morning between some silk sheets, you won't know who she is, and you won't know where you are. You'll go to the window and it's the Riviera. Don't go." You know, "Go somewhere and be by yourself until you can come back and really give us something."

MDK: I think he probably knew better than you did how undisciplined you were at the time. (OVERTALK). You know. It was a very – it was a very smart thing for him to tell you, because you could have been lost in New York.

BK: Actually, I shouldn't have even gone to San Francisco.

MEH: That is what I was thinking. That's not where nobody was. [OVERTALK]

BK: The funny thing was I shouldn't even have gone there, and I began even slowly then to actually, unconsciously and consciously, pull away from everybody, and after I met Martha, especially. Because somewhere along the line he was right. I knew he was right. I knew he was absolutely right. But, but what went on at Black Mountain was I would have great bursts of work, where I'd be able to work, and then I couldn't work for months, and then I'd get very restless, and then I'd go hitchhiking. Or I'd come up here to New York, and I'd spend two months up here, dissipated. And then I'd go back, and then I'd leave again, and then I'd leave Black Mountain again, and then I would come back. And actually the sad thing was I – Six months before the school closed, I had phoned Wes, and I said, "Look, I'm really tired of what I'm doing. I want to come back. I want to make up a graduation program. I want to do it, and I'm going to stay." You know, literally, "Can I come back?" because I had been in and out so much they were getting sick of me. You know. And I couldn't blame them for it, you know. I really

knew what they were talking about, you know. Two weeks, no, you know, in, out, in, out. So he said "Sure." He said, "I don't even want to talk – I don't even have to talk to Charles. Please. Just get up, get on – "So I did. I came back and I made up a program and I was really quite in earnest. And then Charles walked into either the studio or my studies building or what. I can't remember. I remember him walking in – yeah, it was actually the studio, The Stables. He walked in and he said, "It's over." And I said, "What's over?" And he said, "The school. It's finished. There's no point. We're gonna close up." And – So that was, that really took care of that. But –

MEH: Did that take you by surprise?

BK: No. But I thought, I thought – I thought somehow Charles was going to stay on. For some –

MDK: That he was going to pull a rabbit out of a hat?

BK: No, no, no, no, no. That <u>he</u> would stay on there. And he <u>did</u> stay on to sell the place, and I thought he would let some of us stay on, but he wanted everybody out. He didn't want anybody there except he and Betty, and I think Wes was there. I think there was like a few staff people, so to speak, stayed. But the rest of us were to get out. And then he talked me out of – Then, I don't even know how that came about. I don't really know how it came about, but he – he said, "You mustn't come back. You mustn't go to New York." And I had such a weird relationship with him that he – In some ways he was an

enormous mentor to me, and at the same time I wasn't one of his boys. I didn't want to be one of his boys. I – You know. And his boys were pissed at me that I didn't want to be one of his boys, you know. But when he – You know, he saved me from going to jail.

MEH: When was it?

BK: Well, I had that, I had that drunken accident in front of the – what the hell – the Veterans Hospital in Oteen.

MEH: I don't think I remember about that. Or maybe [OVERTALK]

MDK: Nobody was hurt. It wasn't one of the spectacular ones.

BK: No, what it actually was – it was the night that we heard Jackson Pollock got killed, and we went into –

MEH: Who is "we"?

BK: John Wieners, John – Joe Dunn, Grey Stone, I think. That was it or maybe – Or maybe it was Joe Dunn and John Wieners. There wasn't too many people in the car. But I had that Jeepster at the time, and we drove in to see Trapeze.

MDK: That brackets it nicely both culturally and – [LAUGHS]

BK: I mean, it's so perfect. It's almost like you wrote the short story, you know. I mean, literally. The three or four of us go in to see Trapeze. Somebody came into the kitchen and said that Jackson Pollock had died the day before. And we went into Asheville, and we bought a lot of beer, and we were sitting in the movie, and we got drunk. Coming back, I missed the light, and to get out of the traffic I went up on the hill.

Remember the hill, up to the Veterans? I went up the hill. I came down the hill. I came through the traffic. Took a fender off of a farmer's car and stopped. And the whatchacallit, the State Trooper came along and asked me to walk down the straight line. And he looked at me, and John said, "He always walks that way."

MDK: Which of course is true! Basil has neurological damage, and he does limp, and he hides it better when he's –

BK: When I'm sober. I do, you know, I do – when I'm sober.

MDK: But he was drunk.

BK: So they took me off to the jail, and I spent a night with a guy who was as old as I am now, throwing up and telling me how his family was going to be disgraced by this. And then the son came to get him out the next morning, and it was obvious they came to get him out every week. It was like one of those deals, you know? But, anyway, the school came to get me, they took me home, and Charles said, "I'm going to get you a lawyer. We've got to get you a lawyer. We've got to get you out of this." And I said, "Oh, I'm just so sick and tired of being so fucked up. I'll go to jail. You know, maybe it's the best thing. I'll go to jail." Well, anyway, he talked me, literally, thank god, thank god – wherever you are, Charles – he talked me out of it. We sat up a whole night, and he talked me out of doing it, because he said, "It'll just ruin your life," which was true. It would have. And he did the same thing about going to – coming back to New York.

MDK: When you think about it, it's pretty impressive. The school was incredibly broke at that time.

B: Well, Grady paid the money.

MDK: God knows how – what favor [OVERTALK] he called in to get this lawyer. [OVERTALK]

BK: No he didn't. Grady paid for it.

MDK: Grady paid for it?

BK: I didn't know this 'til years later. Grady paid for it.

MDK: Well, then he went to Grady and arranged it. I mean –

MEH: So, he got you off?

BK: No, they – I came in. They got me a white shirt. And we came into court and we sat, I sat with the lawyer, and the lawyer said, "Your honor, we've got a college boy here who got into trouble, a little trouble last night."

MDK: Whatever, it was. A week ago. [LAUGHTER AND OVERTALK].

BK: A week ago or whatever.

MDK: On a Saturday night.

BK: What was actually again like kind of interesting was there was a young man who had been before me who was like maybe the fifth time he'd been there. Maybe he was a year older than me. And he had the con. He had this jailbird con he was giving the judge. And I was sitting there and I was saying "You're gonna go to jail. That con is so thin. They're gonna throw the book at you. Don't you know any better? Now when I

get up on the stand, I'm not gonna do that." But I never got called. I didn't have – [LAUGHS] The case was dismissed. The poor farmer didn't get a penny. I mean, I was humiliated. I still feel terrible. This farmer stood there with his wife and children, looking at me like "You son of a –."

MDK: You know, privileged college boy. [LAUGHTER]

BK: You know. Exactly.

MDK: It doesn't matter that it wasn't true. He still didn't have his fender.

BK: He didn't have his fender.

MEH: But you didn't go to jail, so –

BK: No, I didn't go to jail, and I didn't get into any trouble, and it was just – It wasn't even on the books, I don't think. I don't think it was ever –-But that was my relationship with Charles, in a way, which was very, very odd. It was a very, very odd one.

MEH: How would you describe Charles?

BK: Which one? [LAUGHTER]

MEH: All of them.

BK: I mean, literally. I mean, you know, I, I knew a bully. I knew a really – I knew a scholar. I knew an enormous man. I knew a guy who was like almost, as I said to George Butterick, "a diesel of the place." He ran – It was his place. It was his place. And I think he needed it. You know, I think he needed institutions. I think he thrived in an institution. He worked for the government, you know. He loved being at Harvard. He

loved Wesleyan – or it is Wellesleyan, isn't it, that he went to? Yeah. He seemed to talk about those places with great, great, great affection. And I think he liked being – I think he was devastated that he didn't go further in the government, you know. But he seemed to be that –

MDK: But he needed the structure it provided for him in some way. I mean, I –

BK: Yeah, we were only –

MDK: We heard much later from people like Tony Landreau who were part of some of those faculty meetings that, you know, it was just – it was just an absurd tragedy of ineptitude. Not that it wouldn't have been damn hard to keep the place alive, given the circumstances, the climate, what the country like, where money was. But oooooh.

BK: But also, you see, I think, I think – It's like my father came to visit. So he and Charles go off to talk. Now my father was only five foot two, but he had worked for another man who was six foot eight. My namesake – who I'm named after, Basil Lucas Q. Henriques. So I was used to – I was used to big men. See, Charles was not to me what he was for most people. His size didn't have that aura to me, because I remembered the Gaffer. Basil Henriques was called "The Gaffer." He was the founder, instigator, and chief bottle-washer, with his wife, of the St. George – well–

MDK: There was the Boys' Club and the Girls' Club. It was a settlement house. It was St. George's Synagogue.

BK: St. George's Synagogue Settlement House, which is on, is in the East End of London. And my father went to work for him as a very, very young man, because he met him at a Fabians' meeting. And Basil came over and said, "I hear you speak Hebrew, Yiddish, and English well, and write all of them." He said, "Yes." He said, "Will you teach me Hebrew and Yiddish?" The Henriques family came to England escaping from The Spanish Inquisition. They were real landed gentry. And from time to time they were Jews, and then they were non-Jews, depending on the politics of the country. And he and his wife Rose started this place and built it into quite a hell of an institution, and my dad worked for him for something like fifteen years. So when my father came down to visit, Charles wanted my father to become a fundraiser for him, and I thought I was through. I mean, not only did I want to get away from him, but I had enough trouble with Charles. You know, these domineering men. And I thought, "I've got no place to go. If <u>he</u> comes down here, I really didn't know what the hell to do. I really didn't know what to do." As it was, my father came to me and said, "Be careful of that man. He wants an army." You know. And so he didn't go to work. He didn't come down. He came to visit one more time, but he never, you know – There was no correspondence or anything. I think Charles wrote him a letter that my father never answered. I think he told me he wrote him a letter which he never answered. He said he didn't want to get involved with the man. He said it was "too close for comfort."

MEH: Your father did?

BK: Yeah. Well, actually, you see, he thought of him in terms of like maybe in terms of The Gaffer, with his dominance.

MDK: It might also have had something to do with sort of disillusionment about the potential for reforming socialism to alter the world and create new institutions, which is something, of course, he'd been heavily involved with as a young man.

BK: He'd been very involved with it as a young man and ended up as a very, very bitter, bitter – [OVERTALK]

MDK: Basil, in addition to creating the settlement house, which was a very powerful force amongst, you know, Jews who wanted to be Jewish but wanted to live in the modern world and wanted to create the modern world. He was also a juvenile – he was a judge who helped create Britain's juvenile justice system.

BK: He came to Washington a lot.

MDK: He was quite a prominent and, you know, competent person in his own right.

BK: Yeah, yeah. His wife – His wife was one of those ladies of that temper who –She wore a toga and played the harp. And I would go up to their apartment when I was three years old. I would be sent for. And she wasn't exactly Miss Havisham, in no way, but she would say "Come here, boy." And I'd get on those bony knees of hers. And she'd play the harp. Oh! Anyway. I remember their bedroom. I remember it very

clearly. It was an enormous, enormous – bigger than our brass bed downstairs. The floors were cleaned. They were scrubbed. They were not varnished. They were white, and there was just a few pieces of furniture in the room and this harp. And then the old lady would – She'd have her toga on. She didn't go out in the street in this way, but she – She was of that class too. I mean, they were Bloomsbury. Okay? And they were Fabians and they were Socialists, and – And around the corner was Toynbee Hall.

MDK: They were s, which gave Basil a lifelong fear of vegetarians. Vegetarians are people who hate children. [LAUGHTER]

BK: No, that was because of my Aunt Ethel. My Aunt Ethel's friends were all vegetarians, and they all disliked children. I was convinced of that. [OVERTALK & LAUGHTER]

MDK: [LAUGHTER] Deep connection. He still is a little bit disturbed about vegetarians.

BK: I am. You know, I do. I don't quite trust them. You know, if they say, you know, they don't like meat – And people that say they won't have meat in the house? They don't want children. [LAUGHTER] That's kind of the atmosphere that I grew up in. So, I mean, Black Mountain meant a very different thing to me than a lot of people that came from the Midwest or came out of middle class bourgeois homes, so to speak. I – It's not like I was used to it, night and day, but I mean, I was taken around into –

MDK: Well, it was certainly a lot easier for you to be a rebel, I would say. You know. [OVERTALK]

BK: Well, I mean, one of the things, I was almost expected. You know, in a strange way, in the family – My aunts, my oldest aunt Ethel married a Royal Academician by the name of Dick Graveney. He was a sculptor. He was also the guy that built the horse in The Thief of Baghdad. He sculpted the horse that flew. I mean – And so I used to take the bus to school, and if I decided I didn't want go to school, I used to change to another bus and go to Chiswich and knock on his studio door, and he'd take me to the Tate. That's really quite serious. I mean, he'd take me to the Tate, and he took me to the National, and he'd walk me around, and he'd talk to me, and he'd show me, and he'd tell me about the art. And we'd go have lunch. You know, a little lunch. And then I'd go back, and they'd phone my mother and say "Don't worry, Basil's with us. He won't be home tonight."

MDK: Or they'd send you back.

BK: Or they'd send me back.

MEH: How old were you then?

BK; I was nine. I was nine and ten. I came here when I was eleven, just over eleven, before I was twelve. But I mean, those – the last year-and-a-half there, and – But also because of my father's connections and stuff like that. Not that I, you know, I was friendly with

these people, but I, you know, we went to the homes of like very, very, very, very rich people. The Montagues, et cetera.

MEH: This was in London?

BK: This was in London. And there was a – There was a strange kind of literary art scene and political scene that they were all involved with that – I, you know, when I came to Black Mountain, it was – it felt very comfortable and at the same time, I – I, pshew, I wasn't impressed with it. And nobody could understand why. They thought I just, I didn't –

MDK: Maybe you were arrogant, or maybe you didn't get it.

BK: I didn't get it, or, you know – And the weird thing about it was if I started telling somebody, [IRRELEVANT COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED] if I started telling somebody about that life, they wouldn't believe me.

MDK: I don't know that that's true. You didn't tell people much.

BK: Look, it was only a few years ago I remember telling Dan Rice, because Dan gave me a book on the Bloomsbury people. He said, "You might really enjoy this." And I said, "Okay." And I forget how the conversation started. I started telling him again, and he said, "Gee, Baz, I didn't know you came from that background." I said, "I must have told you seven times."

MEH: Were your parents a part of this through their political interests, or through their art interests, or both?

BK: Both. Both.

MDK: It was really more political.

BK: But yeah, finally, with my father it became much more political than art. But they certainly weren't anti-art. I mean, he's the man that said to me, "Read D. H. Lawrence. He's a great writer. He's an anti-Semite, but he's a great writer." I mean, so there was that kind – Look, when I came into Black Mountain, I said something like "Dostoevski's the greatest writer in the world," and Fielding Dawson said, "Yeah, man. Yeah. Yeah." But I mean, I was a – I was sixteen, and it didn't – you know, it's hard to talk about it that way, because it just didn't throw me. There were a lot of people who really truly were getting an introduction to a world they had no idea existed. Otherwise, you –

[END OF AUDIOTAPE 1, SIDE 1. BEGINNING OF AUDIOTAPE 1, SIDE 2]

MDK: I think for other people it wasn't. When you think about Mary Fiore, for example. She came from a very eccentric family. Joe Fiore came from an artistic family. His father was a professional classical violinist or viola player. One of the strings he played.

BK: I think it was viola.

MDK: In the Cleveland Symphony. You know, so there was a mix there always of [OVERTALK] people who, who were, you know – The Nick Cernoviches were there. The Tom Fields. But there were also the Fiores.

MEH: There definitely were people, yeah, who came from a background like mine, a totally non-art-oriented [OVERTALK].

BK: That was the majority.

MDK: You think?

BK: Oh, yeah. I think so. I mean, like Dorothea Rockburne came from a very prominent Canadian family, but they had absolutely nothing, nothing to do with art, you know. They were in politics. They were in business.

MEH: So, when you came to Black Mountain, did you know you wanted to study art?

BK: Oh yeah. [LAUGHS]I mean, I –

MDK: When did you think – first start thinking of yourself as a painter anyway? Somewhere between twelve and sixteen. [LAUGHTER]

BK: Well, actually before that.

MDK: Before you were twelve?

BK: Yeah. I was drawing in London as a child. I was drawing –

MDK: Drawing is one thing. Really thinking of yourself like "This is – I'm going to be a painter. This is what I'm gonna do."

BK: I think I was about fourteen.

MDK: When you first saw Jackson Pollock, for example.

BK: No. Well, I already wanted to paint.

MDK: But I don't know how old you were at that time.

BK: When I was fourteen, fifteen years old, I had a very close friend by the name of Tom Novachelsky (PH), who was from Hamtramck. This was in Detroit. And he had a great, great big old car, an old Packard. And I remember we drove by the museum, you know, the Detroit Institute,

and he looked at me and he said, "You really gonna be a painter? " and I said, "Yeah, yeah. I'm really going to be a painter." You know, because I was taking Saturday morning classes at the time. I was the youngest person that ever got into the state art show, the Michigan Art Show.

MEH: You were taking classes at the Detroit Institute, or where?

BK: Yes. Saturday morning classes. And then at fifteen my father paid for a summer's enrollment in the Arts and Crafts, the local school, which had its – which had its good points and its terrible points. I mean, Sarkas Sarkisian was the head teacher there, and he wanted you to put ochre over a white canvas so you didn't have to look at the white. [LAUGHTER]I mean. And I had another teacher by the name of Klicker [PH]. God, the things you remember.

MDK: [OVERTALK] You've never forgiven.

BK: Don't use Prussian blue. There was another. Guy Palazzola, who said, "You mustn't paint in the corners." I mean, what the fuck were you supposed to paint? You were gonna cover it with ochre, don't use Prussian blue, don't paint in the corners. I mean, go in the center and make faces, you know. [LAUGHTER]

MDK: But speaking of that though, isn't that what you do? [LAUGHTER]

BK: But, I mean, the funny thing was this is like provincial art training anywhere. It really is provincial art training, you know.

MEH: It sounds like the people were not terribly imaginative.

BK: Nah. I mean, you know, [OVERTALK] they were competent.

MDK: They were probably competent.

MEH: Real pedants.

BK: They were competent. They did know where the canvas – It was canvas.

MDK: You got much better training at Cass Technical High School, though.

BK: Yes.

MDK: And oddly enough, there was a Black Mountain connection there. I don't know whether Basil ever told you, but [OVERTALK]

BK: [OVERTALK] Have you met Donald Thrall?

MEH: I have.

BK: You have.

MDK: Well, Basil was one of, you know – the students at Cass Tech when he was teaching, so he was getting his Albers before he went to Black Mountain.

BK: Well, that's a joke between Jerry van de Wiele, Jorge Fick, me, and Terry – what was Terry's last name?

MDK: Oh, I can't remember. It was a long Italian name. She married Sal Friesche [PH] but she had another name.

BK: Then she changed her name and really goofed me up forever. But Terry – Anyway there was a whole bunch of us. The big joke about the school of, the New York School that came in.

MDK: Minimalism started.

BK: Minimalism and the whole stuff that came in was like, "Oh, well, we got this in the ninth grade!" [LAUGHTER]And it was true.

MDK: You did all the exercises.

BK: Thrall gave you a year. You know, he gave an incredible course. I didn't know how good ‘til I was older. I mean, I really didn't know to appreciate it that much.

MEH: I can't remember whether I asked him this or not. Do you think this was based at all on what he had learned from Albers at Black Mountain?

BK: Yeah.

MDK: Absolutely.

BK: Oh, yeah. Yeah. He gave it – He told us. He told us. He showed us Albers, and, you know, and he showed us Kandinsky, and he showed us –he showed us Turner's color wheel. He showed us exactly –

MDK: You did a lot of those Albers' exercises [OVERTALK] –

BK: With colored papers. Those colored paper things. Yards and yards and yards. [OVERTALK]

MDK: Tony Landreau gave a little of this in his weaving class when I was in Black Mountain.

BK: Yeah. And it was invaluable. I mean, it was a beautiful eye trainer. It was a beautiful eye trainer, you know. And scents. I mean, it goes into your nose too, in a way. But I mean, you do, you start smelling the thing. But I mean, in Detroit, I mean – so that was going on. In the meantime, because of my family – I think I mentioned this before, my

family position situation. I was losing – I was losing daily. If it wasn't for a teacher at Cass Tech, Blossom Coho, who I've just met – what, we saw her three years ago? I'd have most probably have been kicked out of the school sooner. Not kicked out. I was asked to leave politely.

MEH: What do you mean by you were "losing daily"?

BK: Well, because I was drinking. I started drinking. I started going down Michigan Avenue and giving a guy a quarter and getting a pint. And I started going into school drunk. I didn't – What happened was, I think I've mentioned this already on the tape, but after my father came to this country, and he couldn't get the kind of job he wanted. He came here. He didn't have a degree. He went to the Jewish Social Services, and they said, "Well, look, in this country you have to have a degree to do what you've done all your life." So they said they would pay for him to go to school for two years, and he wouldn't do it. And what he ended up doing was becoming a shamus on a cemetery, which is saying the prayers for the dead and presiding over funerals. And my mother and father moved out to Gratiot Road, something like seven, eight miles before you get to Mount Clemens, and I said I wouldn't go with them. So I started living with my aunt, and then went to an uncle, then went to a great aunt, then went to live with people in the school. And in the meantime, my school work was just going to pieces.

MDK: There had been a really major family collapse. His father had not wanted to leave England, and if he did leave England, perhaps wanted to go to Palestine.

BK: He did. He did. He did.

MDK: He had been involved in raising money to buy weapons to fight the British.

BK: We had seventy-two hours to get out of the country.

MDK: Yeah. So, you know, he was caught and given a choice: leave or face a trial. [OVERTALK]

BK: And my mother said she wouldn't go to Palestine. She had just come through another war and she couldn't face it. Well, instead of him going to Palestine by himself, which he should have done, and sending us to America and saying "Okay, if it doesn't work, I'll come to America; if it works, you'll come to Palestine" – which would become Israel.

MDK: Everything seemed to implode in his life, and he [OVERTALK]

BK: And he went to – whooh!

MDK: Yeah, he did. He really did. And it destroyed the family.

BK: It did.

MDK: And it damn near destroyed Baz.

BK: And in the meantime, then he didn't want me to do anything. He literally wanted me to sit by him like –

MDK: At the end of his days "You don't understand me. You don't understand me. You don't know what I go through," you know. It was just – He turned into a cannibal.

MEH: So, you were really having to escape.

BK: So, I was having to escape, and I, you know, there was no place in that sense – You could – I thought – You couldn't even go out to sea until you were eighteen. No.

MDK: You couldn't.

BK: You couldn't. And I wasn't even sixteen at the time. And my only salvation at the time was, in some ways, was I would paint. When I could keep it together, I painted in my aunt's basement. And I played the horn. I played the horn. I didn't play the horn. I bought a horn, and I put a mute on it because nobody could stand it.

MDK: That was a smart move.

BK: I'd go down and I'd [OVERTALK, LAUGHTER] blow my brains out, you know. You know. I mean, literally blew my brains out. And then, you know, and then I was reading Schopenhauer, and I was reading Kant, and I was reading Plato's *Cave*. Oh God, I didn't know what the fuck –

MEH: Who was directing you to these people?

BK: Me. [LAUGHS]

MEH: You were just finding them? [OVERTALK]

BK: No, these things [OVERTALK]

MDK: It was a literary culture that he had in his household just like I had in mine so it wasn't that odd. [OVERTALK]

BK: It wasn't that odd. It wasn't like I was going, you know, I had to look across –

MEH: These are the things other people were reading. [OVERTALK]

BK: Yeah. I mean, they were things that were available [OVERTALK]

MDK: They were considered like cultural avatars. If you wanted to know about the world, you'd go read them.

BK: You'd go read them. But I was having no instruction, so to speak. So I was getting more – The more I was doing, that's what I mean. Daily, I was going downhill in a way, because I was getting no instruction. And I was living a very, very odd life, you know. And then it moved – from the summer that I had spent at Arts and Crafts, I met a whole – I met about six or seven young men who were veterans, who were on, you know, the vet's bill – going to art school. They were not painters. There was one painter among them, who was – I can't remember his name, but he actually was a painter. Ann wanted to go back and buy his paintings.

MDK: Ann Simone?

BK: Ann Simone. She said one day, she said – .

MDK: Have you ever run into her? I don't know what her married name is. She was at Black Mountain.

BK: But she was also Detroit, see. She was at Cass Tech. [OVERTALK]

MEH: There was a whole contingent [OVERTALK]

BK: She was also at Cass Tech. [OVERTALK]

MEH: Even going back into the forties, before your time.

BK: Yes. Yeah. And but anyway, she had thought – When she got her money, she thought of going back to Detroit and looking to buy some – see if she could find this guy's paintings. They were odd. They were extremely, extremely personal odd, and he took a long, long time to do them. But the rest of them, they weren't painters. They were just young vets who were kind of like –

MDK: Trying to recover from the war, probably.

BK: War, you know. And this guy, Harold, a black guy, kind of took me under his arm, his wing. And I got, I got introduced to jazz. And the black life in Detroit. [OVERTALK]

MDK: That you did need an introduction to.

BK: And that was wonderful, and it was also into a black Detroit culture which would have never, never been permissible by myself or anybody else white. And see, I also caught epilepsy.

MDK: You don't catch it.

BK: Well, I received it. [OVERTALK].

MDK: Says Martha, the neurological disease expert –

BK: Well, I caught it. I received it. I began to have attacks of it when I was twelve. And that was another thing. I was on heavy-duty medication that was really not good.

MEH: And drinking?

BK: And drinking. It was not good. And actually Harold, when he took me over to his friends. They handed me some grass and I – There again I was lucky. I threw the pills away. I said, "I don't need this. I just don't need it." So I threw the pills away. Grass was much better for me. So by the time I got down to Detroit –

MDK: Down to –

BK: I mean, I got down to Black Mountain, I'd already been introduced into that too, you know.

MDK: Well, see my introduction to jazz was actually at Black Mountain. I had never heard that music much. I mean, I'd – My parents weren't particularly musical and –

BK: Musical? [LAUGHS]

MDK: Not at all. Not at all, at all. And, you know, in Chapel Hill with my friends, we were into folk music. We were into all that stuff, Appalachian, the Lomax brothers and stuff. So I'd heard blues singers. I'd heard Lead Belly and like that, but I didn't know anything about urban jazz, be-bop, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, all of that.

BK: Mr. B.

MDK: All that was really new at Black Mountain. People had great record collections. Ahhh, yeah. I mean, that's a sort of singular image of Black Mountain is like Miles Davis music coming down the hill. Somebody had a record player in the window. They would play it for everybody,

you know. I mean, friends down at the lake. [OVERTALK]

[LAUGHTER]

BK: They'd put speakers in the windows.

MDK: And you'd just walk by late at night, just hear people blasting away. It was great.

MEH: What do you think – What did jazz mean to you at the time? I mean, we have this classical stuff we keep in the background here because it's sort of company. It doesn't –

BK: Well, you see, when you think about jazz in the fifties and then – I wouldn't – I wouldn't say that it corresponded to Abstract Expressionism, but in a way what you could easily do, you could look at that painting and listen at the same time. You know, it's funny. A Pollock painting and a Parker riff have some of that same ecstasy. And because there was ecstasy in both of them, there was something that you could, you could correspond with, in a way. I mean, de Kooning, a European, unleashing that kind of ecstasy on a canvas, and then you'd go see, hear Mulligan or something like that. There was a great – There wasn't that kind of great division between the arts. Then [OVERTALK]

MDK: Music not being a fixed form, it did, actually –I mean, it corresponded in many ways with what was – with the kind of poetry that was interesting, that is interesting.

BK: And Creeley, I mean –not to know jazz around here –If I'd hear Creeley, read a Creeley poem, you might as well be listening at that point, in the fifties especially, to a foreign language. You know.

MDK: Where things could shatter, be turned upside down, be re-used, turned around –

BK: Well, cool. That kind of cool. That kind of bop. [OVERTALK]

MDK: Freedom to like play with the material, which was available only in those other art forms, and they all seemed rather new. [OVERTALK] For me, as a white Southern woman, girl, it also had that quality of kind of a view into the thing – The thing that was utterly denied to you as a kid growing up, middle-class white in the South, which was of an adult male black man. You never knew them, you know. They were just zip. Non-entities. So there was that kind of curiosity. But that's sort of social, and it really isn't as interesting as the aesthetic part of it.

BK: But then the strange part about Detroit was also, was – speaking of this, one of my Saturday morning classes –I mean, I have this in the *Mirage* too, but it's literally true. You go past this Diego Rivera mural and there was a staircase at the end. You go up it, and you turn left, and there were these little rooms where they always had shows from out of town. Well, I went up there, and they had Jackson Pollock. Well, I stood there and I thought I was going to be transported up to heaven. I never had gotten so god damn excited in all my life. I couldn't catch my breath. I was just [MAKES CHOKING SOUND]. And I walked over

to Cyril Miles, the teacher, and I said, "What's that all about?"And she said, "Forget it."

MDK: [LAUGHS] Just a passing fad.

BK: She said, "A passing fad." I mean, she talked about it as if it was Billy Graham and Keith Haring, you know. You come in for the moment's excitement. You know, the day – You're gonna feel good today, you know. Don't worry about it, Basil. But I kept going back. I kept going – And I had no connection that that was going to be there – I was going to get connected through Black Mountain. When I went to Black Mountain, I had no idea that they had connections with, you know, what was in New York, so that – And I'd certainly never heard of Kline. I'd seen Arshile Gorky, because he'd been written up a big article in Art News, and I was fascinated with those, you know, those things. And – But I still had no connection with what I was going to see at Black Mountain. Fielding had a drawing by Franz on the wall in his study. And, you know, and I said, "That's got something to do with Jackson Pollock." And instead of being flippant, Fee said, "Abso-" – You know, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, and then he started talking to me about de Kooning. And this one told me about this one, and this one told me about that one. And then by sheer accident – I'd only been there not very long, at the Black Mountain – there was a large exhibit in Greenville, the Women's College –

MDK: Greensboro.

BK: Greensboro. It was still the Woman's College. And Guston, Kline, oh who's that other –?

MDK: James Brooks?

BK: No, no, dear.

MEH: It wasn't Tworkov, was it?

BK: Jack. Jack was there, and another guy. Oh, I can't remember his name. But anyway –

MEH: It was an art dealer who came down with them.

BK: Well, Charlie Egan came with them. Egan came with them [OVERTALK]

MDK: Who was at Greensboro to arrange this? [OVERTALK]

BK: Well, no, the guy who did, the guy's name I can't remember, he ended up painting figures. I can't remember his name. He knew the faculty member in Greensboro, and he got the guy to give them the show. Well, they got a station wagon and these meshugganahs drove down to Greensboro from New York, and on their way back – because Franz had been at Black Mountain the summer before I came. I came in September, and he'd been there that summer before I came.

MEH: That was '52.

BK: That's right. It <u>was</u> '51 I went – not '53. But anyway, but they all came up to BMC and stayed a few days, and they came around to the studios. And I had been, I had already started painting, and they were very, very, very nice to me. All of them. You know, they said, "Well,

when you come to New York, you know, come see us," which is unheard of today. I mean, today it's like the international spy scene. You don't go to people's studios. You know. I was in a show with somebody, and I said, "I'd love to see some more of your work," and the guy looked at me like I was going to fuck him!

MDK: It was bizarre.

BK: You know, it was bizarre. Anyway, they came down, and so I had entrèe right away, when I came up to New York to visit that Christmas.

MDK: Mind you, they were not stars of the international art world at that time. [OVERTALK] When Basil came up the first time and went to see Franz Kline. Franz was sitting out on the street with his furniture.

BK: No, no, it wasn't –They were bringing it out.

MDK: They were bringing it out. He was being evicted for non-payment of rent, not because he was profligate but because he didn't have the dough, you know.

BK: And then what's his name, I said, "Well, you know, I'd love to meet – I'd really love to meet Bill de Kooning. Is that possible?" He said, "Sure, he's just around the corner," and he wrote the address down. He said, "Go knock on the door and, you know, tell him Franz sent you." And I went up the stairs, and he and Elaine were having one of those domestic drag-out fights that only married, only old married couples have. And I said, "If I don't knock on the door, I'll never come back." So I took a deep breath, and I knocked on the door. And there was this

dead silence. You know, boom. And I knocked again, boom. And Elaine opened it, with her eyes just furious! And I said, "I'm Basil King, and I have an introduction from Franz Kline." And she closed the door, and then he came to the door – Bill – and he let me in. And you know, and it's true, he wasn't famous then. He wasn't famous then. He showed me everything. Not everything. He showed me five, six paintings.

MDK: Well, that's really, you know, you were a seventeen-year-old kid, and he said, "Okay, yeah." Laid pictures out.

MEH: They weren't selling and earning money, but they were really by that point beginning to form as a group, and –

BK: They'd already formed as a group. [OVERTALK]

MEH: Several – a couple of years earlier.

BK: The group broke up three years later. You see, as soon as the [OVERTALK]

MDK: The wealth.

BK: Yeah – Well, that happens to all groups. It's the only the outsider who's out all the time. You know, in or out. He's out. You know, he's out. He or she is out. But they, but the group broke up three years later when the money started really coming in, you know.

MEH: At Black Mountain, you were familiar with the work of Pollock. And then you began to be introduced to these other people?

BK: Yes.

MEH: What was your relationship to Fiore?

BK: Joe? Joe was a good teacher.

MEH: You saw yourself as a student of Fiore's.

BK: Oh, God, yes. Listen, I saw myself as student to everybody. I mean, I have never [LAUGHS], I have never thought of myself as a contemporary of any of these people.

MDK: You were even at one point a student of Fielding Dawson's because he helped you with the first short story you wrote.

BK: Yeah. The first short story I wrote down there, he went [RIPPING MOVEMENT]

MDK: Cross, cross, cross.

BK: And he said, "The sky is blue."

MDK: He got all the way down to like practically the bottom of the first page and there was this sentence.

BK: And he handed it back to me, and said, "Are you pissed?"And I said, "No, that's what I gave it to you for." You now. And it was a great – In that sense – But I didn't become anybody's acolyte. But when I first went down there, I didn't compare myself with anybody, not a question of equal but as a contemporary.

MEH: How would you describe Joe as a teacher? How did he conduct his classes?

BK: He was a very good conservative man. He was like his paintings. They're incredibly competent. They're incredibly funny at times. And –

Well, like he walked into the studio, and he said, "You should never put a big painting on a small canvas."

MDK: And that's a very different kind of statement than "Never use Prussian blue."

BK: Right. I mean, that's chump, you know. That's the kind of teacher he was, in a way. I found him really as a very good, very good teacher. I mean, my introduction to Joe was – I brought some paintings down, and [LAUGHS] and I've written – this is in a couple of magazines already. I think I even gave it to you, you know, to put in the, on the archive wall or something. But, you know, I came down for the interview. They told me to bring some paintings down, so I brought three paintings down. One of them was a sleeping boy on the beach, with a banana, you know. Sixteen years old.

MDK: Large banana.

BK: Large, yellow banana. And me in this fetal position, you know, on the beach, you know. I didn't know from shit. And Joe looks at me, and he says "Well, we all have our Surreal periods." [LAUGHTER]

MDK: But, you know, there is a generosity.

BK: That really describes, in those two moves, is like – He wasn't mean or picayune. He wasn't picayune in the sense that he competed with you. I mean, some teachers, especially in Detroit, they do.

MDK: People can be extraordinarily cruel to students who are so vulnerable. I remember it happening at Thomas Jefferson, the resident poet. And

there was this young man. He painted and he drew and he did everything. And he was pretty fucked up and alas has continued to be even more so. But at that time, Basil kind of took him under his wing. And he just had his hunch just scrunched, because he took his poem to this supposed poet. And it was a kind of messed-up poem about being androgynous, about being a man and woman both at the same time. And the poet just, just got mad at him and said, "Look, you can't do that." You know. And he was really trying to work out something that was bothering him, and using poetry to do it. Hey. You know, you treat a kid tenderly. Well, that's what Joe did for Baz. It was really all right.

BK: So we never really became friends. We never became –

MEH: Did he have a – Did you work basically on your own in your studio? Did you go to class?

BK: With this class, there was crit class, you know. You couldn't come to class without a painting. And like Charles's class, you couldn't go without a piece of writing. So that's one reason I started writing down there. You know. I'd written a little before, but I mean, I didn't take it, you know – You know, to come to class, you have to have something written, so – And certainly you couldn't walk into those classes without some kind of intention of seriousness. So – But Joe, but Joe, I don't know. You know, I found him, you know, incredibly – I use the word "conservative" because he never pushed himself that hard, and he

never would push you that hard. You know. I don't think he pushed himself.

MDK: Maybe that was good as a teacher, in some ways.

BK: Well, I don't know, because there are times as a teacher you really do need to take, say, the lids off. You know, you've got to just push. As I said, to this guy when I was teaching, “Look, if you're going over the edge, I'll be there. But you've got to do it, because you're doing – You're repeating. You're going the same – You're not moving. You're just not moving, and you're not going to get anywhere. You've got to learn how to open it up for yourself, you know.”

MDK: Joe didn't do that for you.

BK: No. No. No.

MDK: He was basically too conservative. [OVERTALK]

BK: Basically all my teachers, the real teachers. Vicente. Esteban was the same way, but he was more demanding than Joe. He wouldn't let me fuck around at all. He wouldn't let me – He wouldn't give me an inch, and that was very good at that time. I was doing these – When he came into a drawing class, and I did this wonderful de Kooning. Boy, it was a gorgeous de Kooning.

MDK: He did it better than de Kooning, huh?

BK: Maybe, I don't know, but it was a very good de Kooning. And he looked at me and he said, "That's a piece of shit.” You know, and I looked up at him, and he said, "Give me a drawing. Of her. Your drawing.” That

was good. You know. That was very, very, very good. But, you know, the thing about teachers are that they really, unless, unless you're already on your own thing already. There's no way they can really open you up. You can copy them. You can learn from them. But they can't open you up for your own thing until you're there, quite there. And then somebody can really kind of give you a clue where I think the door is. So I never had any teachers that way. But I learned an incredible lot from Kline. I learned an awful lot from Philip Guston.

MEH: Now Kline had already been there. [OVERTALK] This was through association in New York.

BK: Yes, this was all in New York. Kline was very, very sweet to me at times. I used to go to shows with him. Openings. Oh, boy did he teach me a lesson of humility. He took me to see Jack Levine, and he said, "What do you think?" And I said, "Aach, it's boring to me." You know. And he said, "Uh-uh [NEGATIVE]," you know.

[END OF AUDIOTAPE 1, SIDE 2. BEGINNING OF AUDIOTAPE 2, SIDE 1.]

BK: And, you know, <u>that</u> was a lesson. That was a wonderful lesson, because it doesn't have to be hip. You don't have to be doing what, you know, is "<u>the thing</u>," you know. You can go, you can stay where you know. Or you can stay or you can move, but you need to move over eventually. The thing was I had copied Jack Levine's <u>Symphony</u>, when I was about fourteen years old, and I thought I was through with it. One

of the great influences on me was Robert Creeley. Because of anybody in America that I ever met or read, he was the oddest.

MDK: Bob was something you weren't going to find in Europe.

BK: Yeah. I mean, that, that, that Calvinism, that prissiness, and at the same time, being a hipster, and that incredible use of language, of thinking. That's one of the largest influences on me, because – and I'm really grateful to this day that we've stayed friends. Well, his first classes, I'm not telling anything out of school. I mean, he was so scared of teaching, he read the newspaper. I mean, he didn't know what to say, you know. He just, his eye watered and that was it. You know. [LAUGHS]Poor man. What was he? He was only thirty. But – his work has been one of the largest influences on me, about how you can take something down. Not build – how the construction of something can come down, not be put up but come down, and still exist.

MDK: I bet not very many people would see that in reading your written work. Not at all, because your written work is –

BK: Is more like Duncan. [LAUGHS]

MDK: More, much more. You are mid-Atlantic. You have a lot of European erudition and extension and a kind of, you know, breadth to your associations and the fluid use of language that it's very literary [OVERTALK]

MH: And you <u>are</u> more like Duncan.

BK: But I think I would be a lot more –

MDK: You'd have had a harder time getting away from England, had you not –?

BK: No, no, no.

[END OF AUDIOTAPE 1, SIDE 2. BEGINNING OF AUDIOTAPE 2, SIDE 1.]

You know, I have a problem. I start with something that is already built, and I can illustrate it. And I don't want to illustrate it. And it took me years, I mean, literally years, to learn how to decompose it, you know, so that I end up with the essence of the thing instead of starting with nothing

MDK: I have a big problem with revivals. Here's this famous preacher, for example, who's never seen somebody through the death of a child, who's never been with a – You know. I mean, he comes in, he gives the revival. He leaves. You're left with your life. I mean, he's never seen anybody through death from cancer or deformed or whatever. The tragedies of life that happen to people. Those indigent – [OVERTALK]

MEH: That's interesting. He doesn't minister to people at all.

MDK: No, he's never ministered to anybody. He travels on. He's in the know, and you're sitting there trying to figure out how to live your life in the face of despair over something that's just unacceptable, that you have to accept, you know.

BK: Or that guy your mother brought over to see if he could talk sense into us.

MDK: Which was that?

BK: Don't you remember the first time we went down to Chapel Hill after we got married, and the minister came over to talk to us.

MDK: [LAUGHTER] I do remember that.

BK: He had five minutes, and he left. Boy, we were good. [LAUGHS]We were really quite good. I look back at it, and I'm amazed how good we were, without ever insulting him. But there wasn't a [OVERTALK]

MDK: Yeah, they couldn't figure this out. [OVERTALK]

BK: No, beside that, look – You know, I learned from Isabella – Years after Martha and I were married and the children were already – not teenagers, but girls. And that painting room in there was our living room at that point, and there was a couch by the window. And Isabella was sitting there with a drink, and she looked at me and tears started rolling down her eyes. And she said, "But honey, what was I supposed to think. I got a letter from your mother saying that you're a juvenile delinquent, and there's nothing we can do about it."

MDK: "And we're sorry that he's marrying your daughter."

MEH: Oh, my!

MDK: Yeah.

BK: I didn't know this.

MDK: Yeah. "We would stop it if we could, but we can't do anything with him." I mean, she really slandered Baz.

MEH: So your mother really had genuine concerns.

MDK: She – Oh yeah!

MEH: His mother wasn't writing saying he's a great guy, you know.

MDK: Or I hope we become friends, or anything, like two mothers-in-law would write to each other. And mother-in-law to mother-in-law is a very weird relationship. [LAUGHS] Indeed it is.

BK: So that really kind of gives you an idea of me in a nutshell, because of what was going on in all those things.

MEH: I mean, you arrived at Black Mountain, really escaping Detroit, in many respects.

MDK: Escaping your family.

MEH: Escaping family.

BK: Well, I was escaping family, I was escaping Detroit, and I – And they didn't have high school equivalency tests in those days.

MEH: Did you finish high school?

BK: No! No! No!

MEH: You didn’t finish high school.

BK: No, no. I left in the 10-A.

MDK: He was asked to leave Cass Tech. It was, you know – He could have gone back to his neighborhood high school. I mean, he wasn't thrown out of the Detroit School System. But he was –

MEH: Was this because of the drinking?

BK: It was everything. Like I was failing my academic subjects. I wasn't paying attention to the art. I was a mess. I was a real mess.

MDK: You were a troublemaker.

MEH: What did Black Mountain – what effect did it have on you?

BK: Not terribly much. [LAUGHS] Actually at that time, not very much because –

MDK: Well, it was that the – just as the school was finally closing when you were going to try to get yourself together to actually complete a graduation program. [OVERTALK] What, four and a half years after you first came down there.

BK: [OVERTALK] That was four and a half years later. But the thing about it was I still didn't really have my hands-on discipline. I was still a really undisciplined person.

MEH: Did you work hard at Black Mountain?

BK: No. Not terribly hard.

MEH: What did you do with your –

BK: I worked in spurts, in spurts. See, I couldn't – I was utterly inconsistent. I mean, there were times when I could work for days. But that was it. I mean, it wasn't like what I can do now. I mean, I can hear the worst thing in the world, and I can come up here and work. And I work every day. I mean, in fact, it's now like I'm a junkie.

MDK: One of the other things we fight about, when we're not fighting about the computer, is Baz, it's time to take a day off. You know. [LAUGHS] "You're coming out. We're going to have a walk in the park." "I've walked." "No, no, no. We're going to go into town." [LAUGHS]

BK: It slowly crept up. It wasn't until around 1970.

MDK: It took you that long?

BK: Honey, for one thing we went to – '69 we came in this house. I still didn't have it together.

MDK: You were still having trouble working [OVERTALK]

BK: I went to Michigan –

MDK: I mean, you put in long hours, but a lot of it was sort of sitting and smoking cigarettes and just, you know –

BK: And staring, and staring at the canvas.

MDK: Going through struggles.

BK: I taught myself a certain kind of meditation. I taught myself of how to just empty my head. Now I can do it really fast. But we got this house at the very end of '69. Then in 1972 –

MDK: We went to Michigan.

BK: We went to Michigan. I got that teaching job opening up the Art Department for Thomas Jefferson, which we kept – I kept the job for almost three years.

MDK: And then talk about working. He worked so hard on the school, his production of paintings just went down to an absolute trickle. I mean [OVERTALK]

BK: I came back after three years with something like four paintings.

MDK: No, it was a little bit more than that. But, you know – I mean, compared to what you'd been doing before it was –

BK: Even before, I still was having trouble working.

MDK: Yeah, I know, [OVERTALK]

BK: I really didn't get working until I had the studio on Hudson Avenue, 1974. After we came back from Michigan there was still a few years of hell. But it wasn't like what I was doing when I was a kid.

MDK: At Black Mountain, when you'd get up and hitch.

BK: Run and hitch, and run, and run, and run. Or, you know, even in New York when we first came to New York from California, I'd spend my days sometimes just walking around the whole of the city, you know. I just literally walked the city.

MEH: How did you spend it – Was there any problem with your not doing anything at Black Mountain? Because you were painting. You were taking classes.

BK: Yeah. I read a lot. I read an awful lot. They had a good library. I mean, I read a lot.

MEH: So you were doing stuff.

BK: Oh I was doing stuff, but it wasn't –

MDK: I think people were very puzzled about you, though. Richard Blevins said when he went into the archives and looked at the faculty evaluations that had been written about Baz, that nobody would say really anything about Baz. They were very – He said they were very peculiar. They were all kind of like very carefully couched, because they didn't know whether he was going to do anything or not. I mean,

you had a very unstable feel. [OVERTALK] When I met you, you were –

BK: Well, Joe Fiore had me up for dinner one night with Mary, he and Mary. And they broached it very carefully, and they talked to me, "Look, Baz, you're going to really ruin what you've got if you don't –."

MDK: "– take yourself more seriously.**"**

BK: Take myself more seriously. And get down to, try and get down to work. And it was very true. I had a reading from the *I Ching* in 1958 where it said, "The house needs building strong ridgepoles." And that was about as accurate as it could be. I had no ridgepoles at the time. I mean –

MDK: You could be buffeted by just about anything.

BK: Anything. Anything. Franz was <u>furious</u> that I left New York to go back to Black Mountain. You know. He thought I should fight it out here.

MEH: And you went back to Black Mountain?

BK: And I went back to Black Mountain.

MEH: How long were you in New York?

BK: At that point? I'd been here – I don't know how many times I came in and out. No, but he thought I should stay here and fight it out here. He said to me, "They don't want you back there. They're sick of you."

MEH: Which is probably true.

BK: It was <u>true</u>. No, he said, "They're sick of you." You know." You've been in and out, in and out, in and out. Nobody wants you at Black

Mountain. What are you going there for? You've got more people that want you here." I was spending most of my time sitting at the bar sometimes here – Well, I'd had these awfully dumb odd jobs. And I was thinking only the other day about my being brought up so deeply entwined with socialism that I could not think of myself other than a laborer. You know, the idea of having a job where you actually didn't labor with your body, so to speak, or do a craft or something was – it was totally unheard of. I couldn't think of it. I couldn't, I just couldn't. I was walking down the street thinking the other day how different it might have been if I had thought that painting – yes, painting -- is labor, but you're not a laborer. You're no laborer. Hah! On the contrary. On the very contrary. And, you know, my whole –

MDK: So, one of the last links of socialist faith. Your breaking from your father [OVERTALK, LAUGHS].

BK: Well, I don't think socialism is at all possible. I don't think it has –

MDK: Doesn't mean he's turned into a capitalist though.

BK: No. But I don't think it's at all possible, and I think the socialist ideal is lovely, but I don't think it's possible psychologically. I don't think anybody's going to give up something for anybody else. Maybe a fool. You know, you can be altruistic only to such a point, but you're not going to give up your own for somebody else. And everybody is going to enjoy the same thing? Unt-uh [NEGATIVE]. For one thing, it's impossible. But psychologically, people aren't capable of doing it. Not

yet. Maybe we will only get to that point – what are those monkeys where their social structure is they fuck?

MDK: Oh, the bonobos.

BK: The bonobos. I mean – but we're way behind. We're still with the chimps. [OVERTALK]

MDK: Aggression and hierarchy.

BK: In socialism, you know, we don't fight. We just – you know, we give it to each other. It's impossible. It's impossible. And it's sad, it's sad, but it's impossible. There's a lot of little things that keep coming up that way of how I used to think about things. You know, the idea of being a master, so to speak. I couldn't equal it with being a painter. I could read it, but I couldn't think of myself in those terms because that wasn't going to be labor. You know.

MEH: Well, I have another question. But you had been associated with people in London who thought of, who were not laborers, you know, who thought of themselves as artists.

BK: I know. I know. But I mean, I didn't think –

MEH: You didn't see that as a way of life for yourself?

BK: Not that way. Not the way that they did it. Not so much the way they did it. You know.

MEH: At Black Mountain, were you interested in baseball then?

BK: Yeah. No. Well, I couldn't play. I can't swing a bat. I literally can't do it because of the nerve condition. And so that let me out completely. You

know. I mean, it let me out completely. I became more interested in baseball through Jack Spicer, because he was one of those guys – What is it called when you have all the scores memorized?

MDK: He wasn't a SABR, was he?

BK: Yes he was.

MDK: The Society of S-A-B – Baseball –

BK: Paraphernalia. Not paraphernalia. Of minutiae.

MDK: They keep minute details, you know, detailed records.

BK: I don't know if he belonged to it, but he had that kind of mind [OVERTALK].

MDK: Is Richard Kostelanetz one of those too?

BK: I don't know. I don't know if Dick is – Do you know if Dick is?

MEH: I don't know. I don't think so.

BK: But he also has lots and lots and lots of minutiae. But Jack had it all the time.

MDK: [OVERTALK] Jack was a fan, not a player.

BK: He was a fan.

MDK: I mean, he knew everything about all the players, you know, and what they were, where they had come from. [OVERTALK].

BK: For some reason, Jack and I would talk about it. Now, why I don't know, but we would talk about it. And he got me interested in really <u>looking</u> at baseball.

MEH: You didn't feel a part of the sort of thing that Oppenheimer and Fee and them were into –

BK: No. I didn't feel that. And I didn't have anything to do with the football. No, I wasn't into any of that, you know. No.

MEH: It really came later.

BK: That came much, much later, and – I never on the same [OVERTALK]

MDK: Poker though was another thing.

MEH: What was this?

MDK: Well, poker is another thing. Poker was a big thing. [OVERTALK]

BK: Well, I was brought – I had an uncle, Lew, one of my dad's older brothers, who was a watchmaker and a poker player. And the fortunes exactly were tied together, between time. [LAUGHTER] And he was – I adored him. I just absolutely adored him. I used to work for him. I used to help him take watches apart, and he'd say "Well, we've got a case of asthma [PH], and we've got a case of measles," and I used to work for him. And help him clean the parts and do all kinds of things with it. Right. The last two years we were in England, we lived opposite each other so I was in his house a great deal. And I used to lots of times sit next to him when he played poker. He was a very good poker player. Anyway, I caught the bug, and the last poker game I had was when we got this house, because in 1969 a fellow bought a few paintings from me and invited us up to Cape Cod with the children for a few days. And we went up there, and he said, "Well, I have a few friends coming from

Wall Street. We're putting a package together." And et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So, we were there. So I sat down, and I played poker with these guys. Now the idea that a painter was going to beat these, these young Turks – Anyway, I cleaned them out. I just embarrassed them, right? And next morning I said, "Well, what can I do to kind of take care of this?" He said, "Well, you buy the lobster for tonight." And one of the guys who had played then to redeem himself even further, said, "We've all talked it over. We're not going to put your name on the package, but your name is on the bottom of the list. It's there. So what I'm going to do with you is I'm going to come over to your studio and take either a painting or a big drawing and that will be kind of payment to be on the list."

MDK: The bottom of the deal.

BK: The bottom of this deal. Do you follow me?

MEH: [NEGATIVE]

BK: Okay, I give you this. You take it. It's like payment. It's like I've just given you fifteen hundred dollars, to put my name on this list.

MDK: Instead of money changing hands, he went in on the deal for a paltry fifteen hundred bucks, and this was a fairly big deal.

MEH: So the painting was like your collateral.

MDK: [OVERTALK] The painting was – in effect his money. [OVERTALK]

MEH: It was money you were putting down.

BK: Instead of ever getting money for the painting, his fifteen hundred dollars' worth of whatever was put in, the Basil King piece of this. And then all of a sudden we got this check.

MDK: Well, it wasn't all of a sudden, because whatever they were going to sell, they had to not sell right away because there were short-term gains or blah-blah-blah. I don't know

BK: So whatever. Anyway, whatever it was [OVERTALK] I'm not even going to tell you what the product is because it's so – Anyway, the thing is, there was a product coming up that was going to, they said, "If it works within three months, we'll sell it and we're going to make a lot of money." It worked, and we got a check, and I wanted to go to Puerto Rico for two years.

MDK: We could live on this if we lived cheap in PR.

BK: And the girls could – we could all learn a little Spanish, and I could paint and –

MDK: We could romp on the beach.

BK: And Martha could write, and the hell with it. We'd come back to New York when we were destitute.

MDK: I said! [LAUGHS]

BK: All of a sudden, Martha grew up.

MDK: I got domestic.

BK: No, Martha grew up. It was not domestic. Martha grew up and very sensibly said, "No. We're going to get an apartment in a good neighborhood –."

MDK: "In a good school district so the kids can go to public school."

BK: And actually we looked on the Upper West Side, and we found a terrific place, actually, on Park Avenue, a nice –

MDK: Not Park Avenue. Central Park West.

BK: Central Park West, on 90-something Street. It was a marvelous apartment, and there was a whatchacallit, an open-classroom school.

MDK: A public school that had open-classroom programs at that time.

BK: And I went over there and we told them we were from Black Mountain. Well, they pushed everybody out of the room and said, "You can have – we'll take your children." I mean, it was terrible, you know, but it was like the way things are. That's why socialism isn't possible. But anyway, another friend said, "You're crazy. You should go out, come out to Park Slope with this money and buy a house."

MDK: You could buy a whole house with this money. [OVERTALK]

BK: Now, Mary, my socialist tendencies in those times were still strong enough – the idea of buying a house was almost like having epilepsy. I mean, I was shaking inside. It was like going against every – In fact my father, when I bought the house, he said, "Next you'll vote Republican." [LAUGHTER]

MDK: Oh, he was furious.

BK: [OVERTALK] But then he came and lived here, and that's another thing. But that's beside the point. The thing is that's a whole other story, but I mean, the thing was – actually we came out to Brooklyn, and the more I looked around it started looking "May be it's possible." And I didn't like the real estate people that I was meeting. You know, they didn't – I didn't feel comfortable with them. And I finally walked into an office, actually over in Carroll Gardens. Not here but in Carroll Gardens. And there was a guy sitting there with his feet up on the desk, and he said, "Can I help you?" And I said, "Yes, I'm looking for a house." He said, "How much you got?" I told him. He looked at me, and he said, "Do you want a joint?"And I said, "That would be very, very nice." And we had a smoke, and he said, "Let me see what I can do for you." About a week later, there was a phone call. It was like six o'clock in the morning: "Meet me at such-and-such place in Brooklyn." [OVERTALK]

MDK: It sounded like a drug deal.

BK: Exactly. Meet me at such-and-such – And I said, "Where?" I'd never even been there. He said, "This is what you do. You take the subway. Then you take the bus, and boom, boom, boom, boom. Meet me there on the corner, "and it was on the corner here. And I met him on the corner, and he said, "Look, there's three brothers in there. They're killing each other over this house. The mother's just died. It was a

boarding house. It's in terrible shape. It's going for nothing. I mean, nothing. Take it!" And I did.

MDK: We did. [OVERTALK] Well, we had an inspector come in. We did do that.

BK: Yes. We had a [OVERTALK]. Actually we had a friend, Karl Steucklin's wife's – Barbara's father's is –

MDK: Is a professional house inspector. But he said the same thing Dan had said. He said, "This house is solid. Take it."

BK: Solid. Take it. It needs a million – It still needs a million dollars –

MDK: That's true too.

BK: But anyway, he said, "Take it." So we took it. That's how we got the house. [OVERTALK]That was the last time I played poker. After that I said, "No. No more."

MEH: Quit while you're ahead. [OVERTALK]

MDK: One win is it. I mean this is good.

BK: That was it, you know. And, you know. .

MDK: This house has really been a great thing for us, actually, and for the girls. And we did have a good public school for them to go to, so – [OVERTALK]

BK: And also we went to Michigan, and we came back and we had a house. We didn't have to look, you know.

MEH: It's really been a base.

BK: Oh. It has been a bloody lifesaver.

MDK: Still is.

BK: It has been. It still is.

MDK: I don't think I could have lived in New York all these many years without having a garden. I know you've found "gardens" to work in. [OVERTALK]

BK: Oh [OVERTALK], when she married me, she said, "I want a house with a garden." And I thought "Some day."

MDK: A garden was something I just sort of needed –

MEH: I know what you mean.

BK: Well, she does. Every morning she goes out. I mean, I hardly touch the –

MDK: [OVERTALK] I fidget with the thing all year round. I raise little seeds in the trays in the window and I do all this stuff. [OVERTALK]

MEH: Our agrarian roots.

MDK: Whatever it is. The first year here I did try to raise some carrots and lettuce and stuff like that, but the little mice came out and they ate them as soon as they were [INDICATES HEIGHT].

BK: Oh, yeah, Judy next door keeps trying to raise tomatoes. She says "I'm going to get a tomato!"

MDK: I'll tell you, the squirrels know, and they eat them the day before they're going to turn red. [OVERTALK]

BK: Oh, it's terrible.

MDK: They take a bite out of each one. [OVERTALK]

BK: And, you know, something else they take a bite out of? Black tulips.

MEH: They eat tulips, oh absolutely. All tulips.

BK: Not white.

MDK: The white ones they don't go after quite as bad.

MEH: Well, they eat my white ones.

BK: [OVERTALK] Why black?

MEH: They eat all of mine. Every color.

BK: We had the Franz Kline memorial out here [LAUGHTER]

MDK: Black and white. I know why they didn't do because I had big – They were black and white tulips interplanted, and they got all the black ones, and the white ones they left alone.

MEH: Tell me what type of white tulips, because they take [OVERTALK]

MDK: They were Darwin's, the lily shaped.

MEH: What has changed for you in all these years about Black Mountain?

MDK: You know, you've been involved in it now like –

BK: What is it, twenty-two years?

MDK: Yeah, we were talking about that before you came. What has your concept of the place changed?

MEH: Well, I started with no concept, because nothing had been written about the college at that point. And I came from a very naive background. [OVERTALK]

MDK: But you were going to school here in –

MEH: No, it was at Chapel Hill.

MDK: Oh, really?

MEH: Yeah, I went to school at Chapel Hill. I was very naive.

MDK: [OVERTALK] That's interesting because there's no – There was almost no interest in Black Mountain from North Carolina at all.

MEH: No, nothing was known. So I started my research knowing nothing. And I think – So it was really trying to find out what happened. At first that was really my curiosity. What it was all about, because obviously something had happened there, just from the little tidbits that I learned. Now it's interesting that I'm interviewing people now that I interviewed twenty years ago, because then I thought everybody I was interviewing was over the hill. You know. I was in my early twenties and anybody five years older, you know. –

MDK: Was ancient.

MEH: Yeah, the verge of death.

BK: Now we call them young when they die at eighty-five. [LAUGHTER]

MDK: "What a shame," we say when looking at the obit, "He was only eighty-four." [LAUGHTER]

BK: Times do change.

MEH: It's interesting now I'm re-interviewing people that people have changed. People who were at a much more difficult period of their lives, you know, in their mid-forties, whatever, early forties, then, or younger and struggling, were much angrier, you know, much more caught up in trivia of things. Maybe people have just forgotten a lot of it

now. But now I find that people are, you know, have gone through these passages. And if people made right decisions in their lives, or what they feel were right decisions, were really true to themselves, that they are much more forgiving now.

BK: This is true.

MDK: It's certainly true of us.

BK: It's true of us.

MEH: Much more forgiving, much more perceptive in different ways, much more generous in their perceptions of people and their memories. So, that I'm finding very interesting. I'm not so interested really in sort of the trivia of details as in broader pictures and perceptions. So I'm finding that you guys – Maybe I've changed. Maybe I'm looking for different things too.

BK: Well, that's what we were asking, yes.

MEH: But I'm finding that you guys have changed a lot.

MDK: So, in a way it's been kind of a window on a group of people, united – a very disparate group of people.

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2.]

MEH: [VIDEOTAPE ONLY: I think you'd be very interested probably if you saw the interview from twenty years ago, because] I'm going to go back and –

[END OF AUDIOTAPE 1, AUDIOTAPE 2 BEGINS]

MEH: I'm going to go back and do some comparison. Even in terms of people's work, a long life, even a moderately long life is a blessing. Things have really matured a good deal for people painting, in doing work in the arts. There are just a lot of changes. But to me it's just I guess there's a fascination to me of interviewing people, hearing about their lives, both in Black Mountain and outside. But right now also I really am winding – I really have some very definite goals in terms of what else I'm going to do, in terms of winding down. I realize now that in terms of my life's work this is what's going to matter, these recordings and the other writing I want to do. I want a time-limit on it. I want to finish things that need to be done.

MDK: Because in terms of the school, of course, the more that you live the less – I mean, we live so much of the rest of our lives and Black Mountain's piece [INDICATES SMALL]

BK: For us especially –

MDK: Even if it radiated out and – when you were here last time, you asked the number of people from Black Mountain we were still in contact with and it sort of astonished me to begin to recite name after name after name.

BK: No, that was that young couple that came to see us –

MDK: Oh, I'm sorry.

BK: The theater people.

MEH: Right.

MDK: That's what I was about to say. Black Mountain – so many friends still are –

BK: And we started naming – talk about name after name, and I said, "My God."

MDK: [OVERTALK] I was really stunned to hear – that part's there.

BK: But we lost touch with a lot of them for years because when I pulled out so to speak – I feel like I was trained as an Abstract Expressionist. I know people find that very funny, to say you were trained, but I was. I was trained as an Abstract Expressionist. At the age of twenty-seven, I really had the sense that that energy had gone, and I didn't want to be a third generation Abstract Expressionist because I had seen enough how dreary the third generation Cubists were. And I didn't have a goddamn thing to paint. I mean, I was stuck in a way that all of a sudden it was like being sixteen in a completely different way, except it was eleven years later and I had already – well, I'd had a lot of interest in my work, in the abstract work, before the Pop Art period. But I had stopped painting Abstract Expressionism even before Pop Art came in, and a lot of people thought I was absolutely nuts. Here, I was getting this attention. I was selling a few things, and, you know, bang, bang, bang, uptown. And, oh, I came home to Martha and I said, "I don't know where to begin. I don't know where to begin. And I – "

MDK: Actually, you didn't work at all for about –

BK: A year-and-a-half.

MDK: A-year-and-a-half. Almost two years.

BK: Yeah, yeah. And I was walking down the street on Second Avenue.

MDK: We would have been in that little apartment on Second Avenue.

BK: I had a studio – later I got the studio in the Anderson Theater. It doesn't exist anymore. But I was walking down all of a sudden, I said, "You know, you're a has-been that's never been, never done anything. What's the matter with you?" And I went to a stationery store that doesn't exist anymore. I mean, you walk down there now and it's a Chinese restaurant. I went in and I bought five hundred sheets of paper. And I came home and I started drawing big leaves.

MDK: No, you didn't. You started drawing circles.

BK: Oh, circles.

MDK: I had – I thought you had lost it. It was bad enough that for two years you didn't work. You'd sit there night after night just doing circles.

BK: I was working. Again I went out as a laborer. I was working with this guy who turned out – Rubino.

MDK: Your mafia friend.

BK: My mafia – he was more than a friend. He was the family.

MDK: Because he had changed his name from – what's the big mafia family name? It wasn't Gambino. He was the other one.

BK: The other one. I've forgotten now. But anyway it turns out –

MDK: He called himself Rubino.

BK: I was working on this job with him,

MDK: His name was so notorious.

BK: But I was working on this job with him, and these guys came in and like you don't know which starts what, the movie starts it or does the mob tell the movies what to do. These guys –

MDK: These big alpaca –

BK: Big alpaca coats, and it's April, you know, because they're carrying. You know. And you can see the goddamn thing underneath. And Rubino calls them over. [INDICATES DEAL BEING MADE] But anyway, he got very good painting jobs, three-color jobs and I worked with him. So I was doing a lot of that stuff. Also the bozo chicken coop –

MDK: The bozo school of carpentry –

BK: The chicken coop school of carpentry. I was doing all those things during those two years off. But, I mean, I didn't know what to paint. I simply didn't know what to paint. Pop Art just bored the shit out of me. I mean, I just had no connection with it. I'm not saying it's a question of bad. I was bored. It didn't interest me. Minimalism was too refined. And now I finally put my finger on it. The Minimalists are truly the conservatives of the Twentieth Century. They are saving a place, you know, for beauty, but I mean it was so refined. It didn't interest me. I had absolutely no connection. And my poet friends were turning political, becoming media stars, some of them. And there was nothing there for us. There was simply nothing there for use. So I pulled out. We just became nomads.

MDK: Not nomads because we didn't move around.

BK: Well, you know we were thinking about doing that, too. Thank God we decided not to. [OVERTALK]

MDK: We sort of disappeared.

BK: We disappeared.

MDK: We sort of disappeared.

BK: We sort of disappeared and, I mean, about two years later I'm doing these circles and I buy another five hundred sheets of paper.

MDK: It happened right about the time – you can practically date it around the time When Mallory was born, our house was full of people. Tons of people came and you know –

BK: Oh, presents.

MDK: Because we were in the middle of a social scene.

BK: Social scene.

MDK: By the time Hetty was born sixteen months later –

BK: A year-and-a-half later.

MDK: Sixteen months later, I don't think anybody came by. It was like we had just really – we really had just psssht.

BK: We disappeared. I had pulled out completely. I had pulled out completely.

MDK: And then when you started to work again, the work was so different, and it was so awkward and clumsy for a long time.

BK: Well, see, one of the things I decided to do, like you say about the machine, was to try and forget, if it is possible, everything you know, and start from the beginning. You don't know how to draw. You don't have a conception of drawing. You don't have a conception of the painting. You know what the Mona Lisa looks like, and you know what a Cezanne looks like, but you really don't know what you look like at all when you start. So I started painting lumps. I literally painted lumps that look like stones. And then after about six

months, I put an eye on them. I put a nose. I thought it would take a few years but it took umpteen years. By that time the world had changed. The whole world changed. Not just the art scene. The world had changed.

MDK: And you had, as you've said eloquently many times since, I had left my generation

BK: I had left my generation. I had left my generation, and all I could think of, more than emotionally, just practically, was that I was going to have to wait until the world came around again for my work to be seen, you know. And strangely enough abstract energy is coming back into the world.

MDK: Speaking of being seen, did you go to into the front room and shoot pictures?

MEH: I will do that.

MDK: I was just worried about losing the light.

BK: We'll be okay. But anyway, I mean all that – I mean all that kind of crazy stuff was taking place, and I didn't really feel confident. I really didn't feel confident about my actual work and that I was actually into something. Until about 1976.

MDK: There's one thing about the world changing, too. There are certain assumptions that you used to have that you still think you can make about who you can call on or where you fit, and if you didn't keep that – and you didn't stay with what that was in your cohort, it's not there for you. And there's stuff that you just don't understand.

BK: Yes. Or stuff that you know that you'll never have. No matter what happens, I'll never have a Bugatti.

MDK: That's true.

BK: It doesn't matter if I win the lottery or if all my paintings sell tomorrow, at sixty-two I'm not going to buy a Bugatti.

MDK: It's not what you want: Well –

BK: You know, I mean – I still want a Bugatti.

MDK: Driving along in a Bugatti is mighty tempting.

BK: It's a beautiful idea but somehow it just doesn't –

MDK: At this point it's sort of like rollerblading. I'm pretty athletic and I do my yoga but I ain't gonna rollerblade.

BK: That's right.

MDK: I look at it and I think, "That's what skating should have been." You know.

BK: When I was a kid

MDK: It just has this wonderful feel to it. You hear it, you know. I'd love to do it, but, nope, I don't want to break my ass.

MEH: I walked with a friend down – for the Fourth of July, we walked down the Hudson to South Ferry and back.

BK: That's free.

MEH: Free, right. We thought it was a patriotic thing to do the Fourth of July. It was really beautiful. We were looking at all the roller bladders. I said, "It's really tempting, but I'm so uncoordinated and I can't break a hip just now. I'm not at the point in my life where I need to be doing this."

MDK: And you're at the point in your life where you know that the possibility of breaking your hip is big, whereas years ago it was remotely possible you could have broken your hip, but it wouldn't be what you would think of.

MEH: I don't need to be the middle-aged lady playing cool.

BK: It's like having a Bugatti, you know.

MDK: Like having a Bugatti.

BK: You're not going to do it.

MEH: Let's go back. We haven't talked at all to Martha about her being at Black Mountain. Let's go back to that, and then I have a few questions about Black Mountain and they will come back. We'll go from there to other things. You came from a fairly sophisticated background but conservative. Is that fair to say?

MDK: Yes. Eccentric.

MEH: Academic.

MDK: Well, you know, that's interesting. Yes and no. My father was an editor as you know at the University of North Carolina Press in Chapel Hill at the time I went to Black Mountain. And he knew about Black Mountain. He had some information and some misinformation. But my father was not actually an academic. He was in book publishing. He didn't have a PhD. My mother was certainly not academic. And my parents were in a very curious way always outsiders.

MEH: In what respect?

MDK: Well, just that. For example, here my father was in an academic community, but he was not himself an academic. And there were ways –

MEH: Was he more a businessman?

MDK: No.

BK: He was an editor.

MDK: Yeah. And he was actually –

BK: A bookophile.

MDK: Yes. He was a bookman.

MEH: So, you both come from literary families.

MDK: Definitely. Definitely. I mean, just for example – here's old gossip. He comes down and takes over the University Press. There were some reasons he had to get out of New York –

BK: He had to flee also.

MDK: – that are very complicated. You know, he was a Southerner for sure so his credentials were okay in that department. But he was the outsider who came from New York, and he kind of interrupted all of the little familial and collegial arrangements that surrounded the press. Who would be published and who was who and who wasn't who. And he tried – he and my mother worked very hard politically to try to set themselves up but they were still – even by the time I was in high school outsiders. And one of my best friends was a niece of Paul Greene, the playwright. I mean, it was still like she could say to me, "Your father came here and ruined the press." So, that's why I say outsider. Because they never really – it's sort of eerie that in their old age they were

"old Chapel Hill" because certainly in the Chapel Hill that I was a teenager in, they were left out. They were they were anything but old Chapel Hill. They were scurrying to make sure they got a few invitations.

MEH: Chapel Hill had caught up with them in a sense.

MDK: Well, the old folks died and some of the people forgive when they get older. Things change.

BK: My father didn't.

MDK: Your father didn't. Anyway, yes, I did come from a very literate background, but they were not strictly speaking academics, and my mother had no education to speak off at all. She was self-taught and not an intellectual.

MEH: They were both from the South?

MDK: Yes

MEH: From North Carolina?

MDK: No, both from Virginia. My father's family was from Lynchburg, and my mother's family from Charlottesville. And from South Carolina – Darlington.

MEH: When you arrived at Black Mountain – One question, did you know John Allcott in Chapel Hill.

MDK: Very well. Yes, very well. Basil – Basil was the person who hit me on the head and said, "Why are you – I used to make fun of him as being sort of a fuddy-duddy, sort of Mr. Casper Milk Toast. He was extraordinarily kind to me when I was a young teenager. I used to audit his art classes at the University while I was still in high school, and when I think back on what he introduced

me to, man I had fallen into the middle – I was like the pig into the pig pen. But I thought – I didn't think it was much.

BK: But we went back – we went back to Chapel Hill to visit, and Martha's mother said, "Oh, Mrs. Allcott phoned and said – invited us over. I said Basil and Martha are going to be here and they will come." And Martha is almost like, "Oh, God, do I have to do this social obligation." But we went and I started talking to this man. It was just marvelous. What he had to say about Matisse.

MDK: Why was I such a snob?

BK: We drive off and I said to Martha, "Where the hell have you been?"

MDK: His classes were so wonderful, and he introduced me to Morandi. Did I know that Morandi was an acquired taste nobody else knew? I thought if I knew about Morandi, everybody did.

BK: Esteban [Vicente] took me up in the ACA Gallery. God knows, Morandi. He said, "I've got something to show you." Meet me at such and such place. And we walked in there. Well, we both – when Martha and I met and we both know Morandi.

MDK: John, he's showing us pictures of de Kooning and Kline so by the time I went to Black Mountain, I'd heard about all these people.

BK: But he was the guy who said – we're sitting there talking, he said, "It'll come to pass. They'll figure it out. Matisse is so much more important than Picasso." He really was a brilliant teacher.

MDK: He was a lovely man.

MEH: He was a lovely man.

BK: So, you knew him too?

MEH: Yes. I took courses with him in Chapel Hill. I was wondering, because he had visited Black Mountain. He was very much aware of what was going on. He had given Albers an exhibition. Had you heard anything about Black Mountain from him?

MDK: No, not at all.

BK: When did he come? It must've been way before we were there at Black Mountain if Albers was there.

MEH: Yes, the forties.

BK: See, I met Albers at Tim La Farge's father's house in Connecticut.

MDK: She's interviewing me now. Stop –

MEH: That's right.

BK: I was just wanted to talk about bitterness.

MEH: We'll come back to that.

MDK: Well, that was bitter.

BK: Boy.

MEH: Let's stay with Martha.

MDK: At any rate, I had had – not only had I taken – audited – classes with Allcott but because of Allcott's friendliness toward me, I had audited some very good art history classes with a German professor. I later worked with his wife at the Memorial Hospital.

MEH: You can't recall his name.

MDK: Big craggy faced guy, and he was quite brilliant. And his lectures, thinking back, well, I got a hell of a lot and I was like – I was just a bored high school kid with not much to do in the summertime. So –

MEH: So, what was your reaction to Black Mountain?

MDK: Well, mainly, as I think I said, I went there as a going away from, not going to. Although I was, as I say, truly intrigued by the Black Mountain Review that I found in the Bull's Head Bookstore that had Robert Creeley's essay on Franz Kline. You're right. I had never read anything like that, and I read it over and over and over again trying to sort of pull it into my world. It did seem like a different kind of voice. I'd already been reading the Surrealists and André Gide and, you know, French writers, I was kind of involved with. I had a boyfriend who introduced me to world lit – Verlaine, Rimbaud, –- so I was engaged in that. But this was a completely different address to the whole notion of abstraction and language. So when I got to BMC, I was pretty horrified what a ruin the place was. It was kind of a wreck. I was simultaneously overwhelmed by shyness because I really had no purpose for being there. At the same time recognized that there was a degree of intensity about these people that really struck a note, and I had the feeling these people, meaning the teachers and some of the students were going to be people that I would continue to want to know. And that was a new thing for me.

MEH: Who was there that summer?

MDK: Let's see, Dan Rice was there and Jorge Fick. Tony Landreau was teaching. Ed Dorn was there. Joe Dunn and Carolyn Dunn. There was Jerry Van De Wiele. There was a friend of Jerry's named –

BK: Bill.

MDK: No, not –- who was terribly depressed and just hung out in his room. Bogart.

BK: Bogart.

MDK: Bogart. Yeah. Grey Stone. A guy named Bill, who had come from the West coast. I don't remember his last name. He'd studied at Cal Arts. He was kind of a jerk. Who else was there? Charles, of course, was teaching. Wes Huss was there. Terry Burns. Harvey Harmon and Lorraine. Stefan Wolpe was there. Bob Creeley was there, and Bob's friend Bill [Robert] Hellman was there and his wife were down to teach. Hellman was in very bad shape. Mike Rumaker was there. Tom Field. I think there were probably about thirty-five people in all if you counted every head. And then a flock of kids. Katie was a little kid. And Freddie Dorn was a little kid. And then the baby Dorns. Paul Dorn was wandering around. Looked like someone out of a Fragonard painting, you know, blonde hair and didn't wear many clothes ever. And the Husses had a child. Bea Huss. What was her name?

BK: It was a boy.

MDK: Really, I thought it was a girl.

MEH: It was a boy.

MDK: Anyway –

MEH: Did you think it was a productive place? Were people really working?

MDK: Yes**.** Oh, yes. The intensity in the place was very obvious and lots of people were working up in their studios and writing. Yeah, there – in addition to the sounds of jazz coming out windows, the sounds of the typewriters were coming out the windows at night. And, yeah. There was a lot of midnight work.

MEH: What courses did you take?

MDK: I was supposed to take painting and I was so shy. I was supposed to bring some painting I had done for a crit with Joe, and I brought something, and I was just – I didn't want him to say anything. I was just – I stopped. I didn't do that. I did model for the life drawing class because I didn't have any –.

BK: You couldn't be that shy.

MDK: I didn't mind if I had to take off all my clothes and sit there. I did indeed.

BK: I can't say anything. Admire me.

MDK: The classes I took that meant the most to me, that I actually worked in were Tony Landreau's weaving class in which he gave us a lot of Albers' color theory. And that was really very good. And we did some weaving. We also did some vegetable dying. And he was very big at that time on clothing reform.

MEH: What did he mean by that?

MDK: It has come and gone as clothing fashion now, but the notion of making clothing out a very simple geometrical shapes and using as few seams as possible. Not wasting material. Some of them were interesting ideas. And the theater. I worked a lot with Wes. And we did a production of Waiting for Godot. Did some scenes from Blood Wedding. What else did we work on that

summer? The production of Waiting for Godot was quite long. We did a lot of scene stuff. He was a very good acting teacher.

MEH: How did he conduct his class? Was there a particular school of –?

MDK: No. When I was in New York and I studied with John Stix for a while, that was much more sort of "method" acting. Stanislavski/The Method. Blah, blah, blah.

–

[END OF VIDEOTAPE 1. BEGINNING OF VIDEOTAPE 2]

[TECHINICAL COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

BK: The tape is off. We can say anything.

MEH: The tape is going. [LAUGHTER]

BK: Oh, the tape is going.

MDK: So, anyway, I was taking class with John Stix in New York, and he raised his rates and I was real distressed about that because we were really awfully poor at that time.

MEH: These were private classes?

MDK: They were group classes. They were not connected to any institution. He rented some little theater space, I guess, to do it in. And some of the other students said, "So, go talk to him. He offers scholarships." And that seemed pretty weird. I didn't know Stix from Stix department stores. I was pretty naïve. So, I arranged to go see him in his apartment which was this very fancy little apartment. Whoo!

BK: You came back saying, "Whoo!"

MDK: Whoo! You know, he wasn't a living over in Hell's Kitchen and in a walk-up like I thought. And so I sat down, and he wanted to know something more about me at that point. He wanted to know where I'd gone to college. And I said, "Oh, I went to this very odd college out in Western North Carolina, and I doubt if you've ever heard of it." And he said, "What was the name?" And I said, "Black Mountain." And then I looked above his head, and he had an Albers framed behind him hanging on the wall. And he said, "Of course, I know Black Mountain. I went there." I was really embarrassed. And he did give me a little scholarship. So I didn't –

BK: He gave you a nice scholarship.

MDK: Actually –

BK: We had to pay a few bucks.

MDK: After that it was very inexpensive. And he left teaching. He went somewhere else, maybe out to Hollywood to do something. A guy named Allen took over the little class. What was his name? Allen, Allen, Allen. He was around for a long time. I would see him doing bit parts here and there.

MEH: You were comparing Wes Huss to – [OVERTALK]

MDK: Oh, I was. I had gotten off on that. The scene study in the methodology that John Stix was using was much more in a way orthodox and recognizable. If you read books or you talked to other people who had been to the Actors Studio. Wes was much more cerebral on the one hand and much less psychological. But more of a poet. So he approached things with metaphors and with the notion that it wasn't important to dissect your psychology in order

to enter into a role as it was to enter the feeling of the work itself. And he didn't give you any instructions on how you might do that. He sort of assumed that you would be able to do that because you would become sensitive to it as you knew more about it. So it was much more directed to the work, whereas Actors Studio is much more – almost verges on psychoanalysis. And it was a very, very interesting way to approach acting. I had done a lot of acting in Chapel Hill with the Playmakers. I had never attended an acting class, but I had been directed in plays by a lot of different people, both faculty and students. That was much more Broadway oriented. You know, you'd go there, do this, you know. Foster Fitzsimmons was a very dance oriented director at Chapel Hill. So he was all body. Wes's approach was something that was completely different from what I been used to and was indeed quite different from what I later found when I came to New York. He was quite unusual. He was very, very – when you say a poet's cerebral, that's a kind of – It sort of sounds like an absence of something, but it actually wasn't. He had great belief in the art.

MEH: Did the classes take place in the Dining Hall? I mean, the productions take place in the Dining Hall?

MDK: No, not while I was there because the dining hall was out of commission and it was in the Studies Building downstairs. The big room downstairs. So we acted without curtains, without sets *per se*. Things were really very, very minimal, and Wes liked it that way. You know, he liked just the suggestion of something, and that was enough.

MEH: But you were still using the Studies Building then?

MDK: Oh, yes.

MEH: The whole building?

MDK: Oh, yes. The whole building.

MDK: Everybody had an individual study but the rooms downstairs were used for exhibitions and performances. The big rooms downstairs.

MEH: Was there a camp there that summer. Were there people using the dining hall? Was it in use?

MDK: No.

MEH: You didn't use it at all?

MDK: No. It was just derelict. It was locked up. It had been closed up to save money. Mallory [Malrey] and Cornelia had been let go to save money, and everybody was on their own to cook as they could.

MEH: Did you shop just for your own food?

MDK: The truck went into Black Mountain twice a week.

BK: You've heard about that truck.

MDK: Oh. That truck.

MEH: No, I haven't.

BK: You've never heard about the truck?

MEH: Everybody loaded into the truck –

MDK: We all piled into the truck –

BK: Went to the A&P.

MDK: We went into Black Mountain and we went to the A&P.

BK: And stole.

MDK: We weren't very nice either. There was a lot of shoplifting going on, and the clerks in the A&P were mostly country folks who were extremely –

BK: Only the managers sweated.

MDK: They knew we didn't have any money. And you'd think there would have been a lot of hostility because where we were the Black Mountain weird, nigger-loving Communists up the hill or something. No. They were very friendly.

BK: They knew we were poor. They recognized poor.

MDK: They knew we were poor.

[END OF AUDIOCASSETTE 2, SIDE 2. BEGINNING OF AUDIOCASSETTE 3.]

[TECHNICAL COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

MDK: The buildings were all closed up. There were a lot of derelict buildings that were shut up, and that were not to be used anymore. The whole lower campus was. We really weren't supposed to go down there and mess around. And I didn't because it seemed very sad. The library was still in the long white building down by the water. The lake was in terrible shape. Lake Eden was just gunked up. It needed drainage work in a serious way. The Quiet House was up the hill and I think I walked up there once. I didn't need a quiet house because mostly it was quiet. But everybody did still get a study. And I lived in Streamside [MEH: Probably Mountain Stream.] upstairs. And what did I do? Oh, Grey Stone and Bill and I formed a little cooking co-op because we were all new. A lot of other people were coupled in one way or another. Joe and

Carolyn, for example. So we kind of cooked together. But that meant that Bill and I did all the cooking because Grey Stone wouldn't. One day we went on strike and said. "We're not cooking. Neither one of us are cooking. You're cooking tonight." He sat and peeled potatoes, sliced them thinly, and ate them raw in front of us. Oh, my God, we were so mad. We stomped off together, walked all the way to Peek's. We were young. Three-and-a-half miles. [LAUGHTER]

MEH: Earlier at the school mealtimes had been the thing that held people together. It was a communal gathering. When you were there, when everyone was cooking –

BK: Yeah. There were little things. We –

MEH: – did everybody get together?

MDK: You weren't there the summer that I was there. So when did people get together? People got together when there were – there were a couple of different exhibitions. Dan Rice had a show. There were events that would take place in the Studies Building basement. And everybody came to those. And then there was always a big party afterwards. There were parties on the weekend. Different people would give parties, and there would be a lot of drinking and sort of jockeying around. That was very informal and everybody didn't go to every party because there were cliques. So I guess it was really the events in the ground floor of the Studies Building that were the only events that you could say everybody came to.

MEH: Was Charles Olson also there that summer?

MDK: He was but he really wasn't teaching. He posted a couple of reading lists that were really crazy, but he was leaving and coming back a lot. And it turns out that either Betty was giving birth to Charles Peter or had just had Charles Peter. The whole marital thing was going on. Connie was there with Kate. And it was very tense. He would come and go and come and go, but he was not actually teaching a class and the people who were there to study with him like Dorn were a little bugged because he wasn't around and they needed him. But I just sort of copied down the things on the reading list.

MEH: Did you study with – was Creeley teaching?

MDK: He probably was, but I didn't think of myself as a writer.

MEH: That was my next question.

MDK: I was sort of all over then. I was Miss-Talented-Do-Everything. Theater, crafts, music and painting were the things that I was more involved with at that time. I did write some poetry, but I was very private about it. I didn't take a class with Stefan, but I remember he was teaching Lorraine and somebody else. And I remember them coming down to the basement of the Studies Building where there was also a ping-pong table. There were manic ping-pong games. Really they were high stakes in terms of ego. Stefan was evidently teaching them something about rhythm and the way it breaks up time because he had them with their backs to the ping-pong table listening to the game and making notations. And because he did that, I started listening to the game that way, and I remember thinking it was very interesting. But I didn't study with Stefan. I studied with Wes and Tony. I guess I felt more comfortable in the theater and

less threatened by Tony than anybody else there. That puts it in a nutshell. Also I'm not sure what I was therefore so it really didn't – For a long time –it took me a long time for anything that I was doing to matter to me, let alone to anybody else. I thought, "It doesn't matter what I do."

MEH: But you didn't stay after at the end of the summer.

MDK: I wanted to. I wanted to return for the fall and I'm sure you know this story. My parents were very, very opposed to it. And the upshot was I dropped out of college. Period.

MEH: So why were they opposed? What was their opposition? Had they come to visit?

MDK: They had stopped by the school. Yes I think I probably told you that. My father that year was the president of the American Association of University Presses, and they were having their meeting in some place like Seattle. My brother was the only child left at home, and they decided they would take occasion to drive across the country, really see America. So, they stopped at Black Mountain. They were pretty horrified, and there was no way that they could see this as a substitute for education. On the other hand, there were lots of things that they didn't do. My father wanted me to acquire a college degree but he wanted me to do it in the cheapest way possible. He was not interested in accommodating to any odd ideas that I might have and not because they were odd but because they would cost more money. And he really didn't want to have to spend any money on his children's education. This is true and peculiar. For example, and this was before Black Mountain.

My last year in high school I had researched colleges on my own. This was before I knew about Black Mountain, and I was interested in Antioch. You see, I was already a Black Mountain kid. And I had written them and I had taken a – sent them an essay and all this stuff, and I had been accepted. I had gone through the whole application thing. I had been accepted and then I had negotiated with them about the money because I knew money was going to be a great big issue. And I had gotten permission from them for an exception to be made so that I could have a work-study during my freshman year which was not their policy. It was supposed to be the second year but because I had money issues, they had a very, very small scholarship fund. So the upshot was it was going to cost about $850 for me to go to Antioch. And my father wouldn't do it. I could go to the University of North Carolina for $300 and that was what he was prepared to pay. Period. Full stop. So there had already been conflict about where I might go or what I might do. I mean, when you think about it, and when my own children were of the age to go to college, it sort of came back. I mean, I did all of this in dead secret. I applied, I took the test, I wrote the essay. I did all of this in dead secret because I knew I would have no chance at all unless I could present it in a beautiful, already complete, here's the package, this is what I can do, this is what it will cost, blah, blah, blah. It still didn't work.

MEH: So, essentially **he** wanted you to go Chapel Hill.

MDK: They wanted that of all three of us kids. Boom. It didn't work out well for any except my sister. She did manage to do it.

BK: And she married somebody with a lot of money.

MDK: Then she left with – she got a Fulbright, and her husband-to-be got a Rhodes, and they were off.

BK: Her father-in-law paid –

MDK: And her father-in-law paid for her graduate education.

BK: Let's not get into all of this.

MDK: But that all is part of why I was where I was or why I had this curious sense that what I did really didn't matter because what I did really didn't matter. I had not been told that it did which is very, very peculiar considering the kind of family I came from and what my father appeared to be to the outside world. He didn't see the light and treat my brother differently. It was just as disastrous for my brother actually. That's another story.

MEH: Was the automobile accident that summer?

MDK: Yes.

MEH: What do you remember about that?

MDK: I was in my room reading and I heard a fantastic – it sounded like a bomb going off. The house shook, and it wasn't our house that the car hit, and I ran outside and ran up the hill, and the car was stoved in on the fireplace end of the building that Mike Rumaker lived in. And actually he was not in the wreck. He'd been in the house when it happened. In the wreck, I think it was John Chamberlain – no, it was Chamberlain's car. Or was it? Was it Tom Field's car?

BK: It was Tom Field's. Tom was driving.

MDK: Tom was driving. It was Tom's car. And Dan was very badly hurt. That's when he did his back in. Who else was in the car? Creeley and it might have been John Chamberlain.

BK: It was John Chamberlain and Tom.

MDK: And Tom.

BK: That's what they tell me.

MDK: Tom wasn't that badly hurt because he'd been behind the wheel. And he did it on purpose. He slammed on the accelerator and drove into the wall. He told me that they – Creeley and John Chamberlain – were baiting him.

BK: No, he said mostly it was Dan who was baiting him.

MDK: Anyway they were –

BK: They were ganging up on him.

MDK: Ganging up on him.

BK: Tom was considered the village idiot anyway. That's what Olson called him.

MDK: Well, in some ways he was. He was a very odd guy and he was very fey. I think that bothered them too. Because he – there were just a lot of things.

BK: He acted so naïve about everything when he wasn't.

MDK: At any rate, that pissed them off. They had all been down at Peek's drinking, and they were bugging him and bugging him and bugging him. And it got worse and worse. And he said, "I did it. I did it on purpose. You want to see how much I mean it. Let's go motherfuckers." And he put his foot to the gas." He was honest about having done it.

MDK: Everybody was very shocked when I got up there. Dan was in a great deal of pain, and they were waiting for the ambulance to come. I was there when that went on.

MDK: And actually that's what Tom had intended, to shock people, that they – I mean, they drove him to violence, and they didn't think he had it in him. It's very fortunate nobody got killed. I think the impact was so hard it knocked – Mike Rumaker was upstairs and he said it threw him off his seat.

BK: I was going to make the point: Tom's violence was no different than anybody else's. Every one of them was capable of doing –

MDK: Being just as violent.

BK: Every one of them.

MDK: That may account for the peculiar forgiving that occurred about that accident. There was a shared guilt. Instead of –

BK: Dan's never forgiven him.

MDK: Well, maybe –

BK: No.

MDK: Dan came home from the hospital in a brace. He took it off. He's down stupping Elaine Chamberlain. He shouldn't be – I mean, he can't blame the condition of his back entirely on the accident. Let's face it. [LAUGHTER]

BK: No, no. He doesn't, but the idea – he would like to pretend that he wouldn't do such a thing.

MDK: That he wouldn't have baited someone to the point of them breaking. Well, he didn't do it alone.

BK: No.

MDK: I think that Creeley was in the backseat pretty drunk and not participating in it is much as the others.

BK: He doesn't even remember it.

MDK: He says he doesn't remember it.

BK: That may be true.

MDK: He fucked up a shoulder I think, and he was limping around for a while afterwards. I don't think anything very serious happened to him because he was so drunk.

MEH: But Dan could do that. You said.

MDK: Bait people? Oh, yeah.

BK: Oh, yes. He loved it. I don't know if he'd do it today. He's sort of old. But back in those days, oh, he was terrible. He was terrible about that kind of thing, that slow cool, Southern California – He'd just keep going, going, going, and somebody would finally blow up on him. That funny little look on his face.

MDK: And there was a lot of ranking. There were a lot of cliques. There was a lot of who-has-the-inside-track-on-the-true-word.

BK: That got to be boring. Even then. Thirty people down there and like there are six competing cliques. Figure it out. [Laughter] Whoo!

MDK: It was a little pressure cooker. There were a lot of very intense people down there too.

BK: And the ambition, thank God. It was ambitious. You look at it. It was very real but everybody was glued in this place with sometimes two corn cobs to eat between us.

MDK: And I remember Jerry one night, as we were walking home from Peek's. You weren't there, but I've told you the story – with Joe Dunn and a couple of other people when we sort of stopped to sit. It was a three-and-a-half mile walk. Anyway, we're sitting in this field looking at the stars and Jerry was saying, "There wouldn't be a single one of the faculty members would be here if they had any other place in the whole world to go." This horrified a couple of other people who were like true believers. "No, they're here because we're creating this like wonderful new world here." And Jerry was saying, "Don't be a jerk. Don't be jerk. Everybody here has no place. They would like to create a place, and they're here because they have no place. If they had one, they'd go there and be there." Which was absolutely true.

**[TECHNICAL COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED
AND GENERAL NON-BMC CONVERSATION.]**

[THE INTERVIEW MOVES TO A DIFFERENT ROOM TO DISCUSS WORK BY KING]

MEH: You were saying –speaking of Black Mountain.

BK: Yeah, this is not a painting easel. This is a show easel. And this easel came from the DuVeen brothers. The reason I have this easel is because of Gavin Douglas. And His mother and father were partners. Gavin's father was a partner of DuVeen. And Gavin's mother actually was a Scottish woman who came down to London as a secretary and married the boss. But Gavin –

when they sold DuVeen's – he gave me this easel. These paintings are really quite recent. This is April 30th, okay. And this from May 30th. And --

MEH: When you do these, are you working from a particular image or --?

BK: Well, the image is "Fourteen Eyes Desire." It's from a piece – they all are going to go into a Mirage project. And so I have that image in mind but the rest of it just really truly comes just through the paint. And that's almost – it's taken me all these years to really get back to paint from, well – before I was using paint really really thinly. They still have a thinness to them but what I basically was doing was drawing more than I was painting. And now these things have become painterly again in the sense that -- I've almost got back to it. The wheel has turned enough that I can think quite openly again about abstraction in a way that wasn't able to do for a long time. You know, it just didn't seem to be there. And speaking of reduction, I can take it down to the bare bones. [UNINTEL WORD]

MEH: This adjusts very well to light.

BK: Well, actually that is quite clear.

MEH: It's a very good light adjustment.

BK: The studio is quite fantastic in a way. I can do a 14 foot painting in here.

MEH: And take it out down the steps.

BK: Down the steps

MEH: It's not really gorgeous but it certainly is convenient.

BK: Well, I always think of something Albers is said to have told his students. He said, "don't go to New York and focus on your studio. Go to New York and

focus on your painting. But I tell you, the ‘80s ruined that. Everybody started talking about studio. You know. But if you can get photographs of those little ones, I’d love that. Those little ones on the table.

MEH: Oh, I want to definitely. Now these on the table. Do you consider them drawings or paintings?

BK: Those on the table in there. They’re charcoal and pencil and a paint crayon. A French paint crayon.

MEH: Why don’t we go in and I’ll get them in there?

[MOVE BACK TO ORIGINAL ROOM]

MDK: The children. It’s 6 o’clock.

MEH: We’ve been talking three hours.

MDK: I realized when I went downstairs, I’m tired.

MEH: You’ve been working hard.

BK: When she’s done this, we can go downstairs and open up a bottle of white wine.

MDK: Yes. Definitely. Definitely.

MEH: Good.

BK: But I really wanted to her to get these.

MDK: [UNINTELL WORD] [OVERTALK] – “The sun is over the yardarm,” folks.

BK: Oh, actually, you haven’t seen this one Martha.

MEH: These are beautiful. I really love these.

BK: You haven’t seen this. In the light

MDK: Do you want to turn the light on up above. That's just going to –

MEH: No, it will just make it yellow.

BK: It's not the light

MEH: This adjusts amazingly well to light changes.

BK: Yeah, I did that yesterday

MEH: All of them, or just that one.

BK: Oh, no. I did that one yesterday.

MDK: It's a goodie.

MEH: Yes, it is.

BK: It came out so fast. I was just absolutely scared. But these are all tied together. It's like, you know – and then there's the baseball that I'll get back to one of these days. I'll do some more baseball.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING. MOVES TO MARTHA'S WRITING ROOM.]

MDK: I wrote a group of poems that accompany a set of drawings that Baz did on Hudson Avenue. So it's going to be – the book is going to be –

MEH: Is this your first collaboration?

MDK: Yes. And there's going to be the drawing here and the poem there. Actually, this was done the cheap way because there's going to be the drawing here, the poem there. Anyway, there's seventeen of them. And then I wrote a little recollection of life on Hudson Avenue. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING FOR TELEPHONE] Anyway, I'm really pleased about the book. [Reference is to "Seventeen Walking Sticks" published by Stop Press.]

MEH: This is Martha's space.

MDK: This is Martha's space. [OVERTALK]

MEH: And you still do your creative writing –

MDK: Here. Yes. I write on the computer actually. I write in little notebooks sometimes. I also write directly on the computer. I'm getting used to it. I'm computerized at this point. [OVERTALK]

MEH: Yes. I am too. There are certain things that I'm not comfortable enough – I just want to sit back in and easy chair [UNINTEL WORD]

BK: Shall I go open up the wine? I want a glass of wine.

MDK: Yes, go ahead. Absolutely.

BK: It's 6 o'clock. You poor thing. You've listened to us --

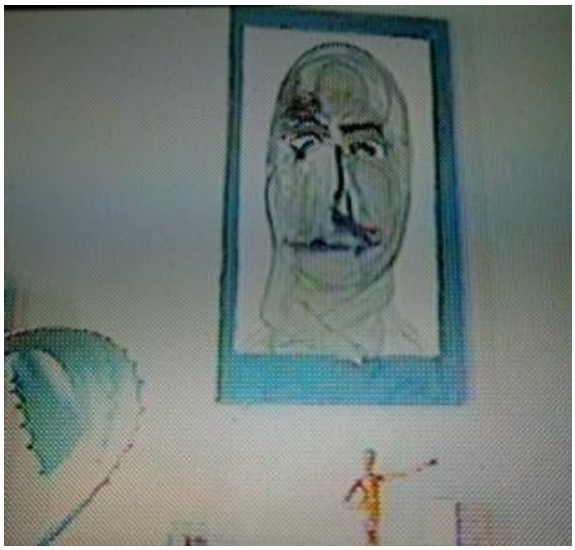
MDK: I keep thinking that I should put my desk all the way up at the top of the house. There's a room – a little bedroom. And then nobody would walk through and it would be – but on the other hand I would hate to give up the high ceilings and this sort of space.

BK: What you say there, Maggie? There's our cat.

MEH: I see. "Hi, Maggie."

BK: Meoww!

[END OF TRANSCRIPT. END OF INTERVIEW.]



[END OF TRANSCRIPT. END OF INTERVIEW.]