

Interviewee: TRUEMAN MacHENRY AND SELMA WEISBERGER MacHENRY  
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[FOLLOWS HEDDEN ON VIDEOTAPE]**

**MEH:** [IRRELEVANT PRE-INTERVIEW REMARKS NOT TRANSCRIBED] [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. Which of you went to Black Mountain first?

**TM:** I did.

**MEH:** Okay. You start. How did you hear about the college?

**TM:** Well, that's a short story, I guess. I had a friend whose name was Andy Fisher, who really ought to figure in the history of Black Mountain. I don't know whether he was ever there. Did he ever visit me? I don't think he visited me there. But he was the one who told me about it. It was just after one of the break-ups. Ilya Bolotowsky and Wharton Day (?) came – I'm from Wyoming. They came to Wyoming, and they came to the University of Wyoming, which gathered up all kinds of refugees from Europe at the time, and it gathered a little bit of the flotsam and jetsam from Black Mountain. They started a kind of, it was a kind of an interesting colony. You can imagine what they would do in a place like the University of Wyoming. They made it an interesting place. My friend Andy, who was very much interested in writing and in poetry and things of this sort, we were staying together at the time, and he sort of became part of their entourage

and he told me about Black Mountain, he was very excited about this. Then I trotted off – I got a job with the government, and – They essentially booted me out of the university and I went and got a job with the government in the Coast Survey and I went off to – finally, after working all over I went off to Alaska, and Andy and I used to correspond in Alaska. I suddenly got quite rich which is to say I had enough money to pay my rent and to eat, for a change, and I actually contemplated and I sent for information and they sent it. Of course all the Black Mountain information looks beautiful and it sounds beautiful and presents a place which never existed. [LAUGHTER] But it sounded marvelous to me. I was quite interested in – I was interested in lots of things, but I was also interested in writing and poetry. It was an interest Andy and I shared.

**MEH:** Now Max Dehn is your uncle, right? What is Max Dehn's relationship to you?

**TM:** Well, that's nice of you to say that. I wish – That's a nice thought. It's absolutely none.

**MEH:** Oh!

**SWM:** Mentor.

**TM:** He's my mentor.

**MEH:** Mentor. Oh I thought (OVERTALK) that you were actually a relative.

**TM:** We were very close. It would be very nice. In a certain sense, I was a relative. I was Max Dehn's last student. Anyway, so – But Max Dehn was a name on a list to me then. I didn't know who Max Dehn was. I was interested in mathematics, an interest – what I did ultimately, but he was a name on a list to me. It meant nothing. I learned what, who he really was, after I got there.

**MEH:** So you're an American-born American.

**TM:** I'm an American-born American. I was born in the Rocky Mountains, right in cowboy country.

**MEH:** That explains the lack of an accent. I thought "Wow, he really did a good job with his accent!" [LAUGHTER] Okay, so you came from Alaska to Black Mountain?

**TM:** Yeah. I had all this money that they paid me and I went to Black Mountain, and I was probably the first student at Black Mountain in many years who paid the full tuition, because it's what I had. I just gave it to them. [LAUGHTER] From then on out I hardly paid them anything because I didn't have anything.

**MEH:** Was that '48 or '49?

**TM:** '49.

**MEH:** '49. Okay, so they just had the big split then. Or one of the splits.

**TM;** Albers had just, just left. There was a tremendous shadow cast over things. I think I was there about three weeks after Albers left, and – yeah, it was the Big Split.

**MEH:** Did you come in the fall or for the summer?

**TM:** I came in the fall. I was there that year and I had to go – I was going to stay that summer and my mother was ill and I went back to Wyoming and stayed with her. I stayed out until the following spring, and then I went back and then I never left until I was finished there. I stayed for the summer and so on until I left in the fall of '53? I went to Chapel Hill.

**MEH:** Okay. Selma. When did you – How did you get to Black Mountain?

**SWM:** I just went – I was just there for the summer. I went to summer school, essentially.

**MEH:** Which summer?

**SWM:** '5- –

**TM:** It would be the summer of '52, because I was there the summer of '53. I mean, I was there the summer of '52 obviously, but the summer of '53. I was there a summer after you had gone.

**MEH:** How did you hear about the college?

**SWM:** I was studying art education at New York University, and I was just interested in going someplace. I looked around at catalogues, and that famous "look" – the brochure grabbed me. I just thought, "Oh, that would be nice." It just happened that way.

**MEH:** Are you from New York?

**SWM:** Yeah, I was born in New York. I'm from the Bronx.

**MEH:** Did the college meet your expectations?

**SWM:** I was – Yes, I guess it met my expec- – . I didn't know what my expectations were [LAUGHS]. It was so different from anything else. I don't know how to answer that.

**TM:** She was there a wonderful summer (OVERTALK). That was the summer of Ben Shahn and Robert Motherwell were there.

**SWM:** Yeah, and the photographers were there.

**MEH:** That was the summer of '51.

**SWM:** '51. That's right. '51. '52 – because '53 we were married in –

**TM:** A ha, so I'm a year, yeah.

**MEH:** Because '52 was when Kline was there. (OVERTALK)

**TM:** Maybe then I was there earlier than I said. Because I spanned – I wasn't there the entire four years, but I spanned four years.

**MEH:** Right. You said you were studying art education at NYU?

**SWM:** Yeah. I was interested in painting. I brought a camera with me, because I read there would be photography. I did a little bit of that. I guess I dabbled around in things, and I did a little bit of weaving in the weaving studios, and didn't go terribly far with it, but many many years later I studied weaving.

**MEH:** Was Ellen Siegel there that summer?

**SWM:** Now. Andy Oates was in charge of the studio, but he didn't put a lot of time in. We more or less bumbled along on our own, but it was fun. It was really – it sort of opened that up a bit to me.

**TM:** When you're finished with the formal part of this, I'd like to ask you some questions about Ellen Siegel and what happened –

**MEH:** I don't know. But I did talk to her many years ago, so –

**TM:** Oh, a year ago?

**MEH:** No, many years ago. Thirty years ago, something like that. Twenty-five. So, okay. That was the summer that Callahan and Siskind were there.

**BOTH:** That's right. (OVERTALK).

**SWM:** And Siegel.

**MEH:** Did you study photography with them? How did they teach?

**SWM:** I did a bit with them. We learned darkroom work. It was a rather personal sort of looking over the things you did. They would give suggestions as to how things might be improved, or what directions you would go. It was a very informal arrangement.

**MEH:** Truman, you were interested in math when you went to –

**TM:** I was interested in lots of things. When I was at the University of Wyoming, the things that I was interested in were languages and philosophy and mathematics. Those were the three things. They tried to force me to do other things and that's where we came apart, at any rate. So those were interests that I had when I went there but I did lots of different things. I did a lot of linguistics and languages. I a lot with music when I was there, and some things to do with Lou Harrison, when he was – Mark, actually, taught a class in music, which I took, and I was in a percussion group there with Jennerjahn, and things of that sort. I danced with Merce Cunningham. [LAUGHTER], with what's her name – ?

**MEH:** Katy Litz?

**TM:** Katy Litz, yeah. First – then opposite, whatever. Yeah, when Merce first came there, the only two students that he had were Viola Farber and me. We had him all to ourselves for quite some time.

**MEH:** Had you danced before, or was this just –

**TM:** No. No.

**MEH:** Your first dance instruction was with Merce Cunningham.

**TM:** No. With Katy Litz.

**MEH:** With Katy Litz. Okay. She prepared the way.

**TM:** Right, and then –

**MEH:** She was wonderful.

**TM:** Yeah, she was, she was very good. Yeah. Yeah. That was very nice. Well, it was a nice thing about Black Mountain that you – all those things were open. They were inviting, attractive things. There weren't any lines that were –(OVERTALK)

**SWM:** You didn't feel you weren't in a compartment.

**TM:** – or barriers. I did a lot with theater. When I was there, I was in the Coc-, the famous Cocteau, Marriage on the Eiffel Tower. I was – Mary Fitton and I did photographs of that. I did sets for that. I did sets for some other – and properties for some other plays. There was the famous *Cuchulain* play, which was under the Studies Building, I did properties for that. I acted in some things there.

**MEH:** Did M.C. direct that? The Cuchulain – is that how you pronounce it?

**TM:** Yeah, Cuchulain.

**MEH:** That was underneath the Studies Building. Do you remember who directed it?

**TM:** I think it was probably Joel Oppenheimer. It was his project, and so probably he directed it. It probably had lots of directors, and probably Nick Cernovich put his two-and-a-quarter cents in every once in a while. But I think that Joel was largely responsible for that.

**MEH:** What do you remember about the production?

**TM:** Well, I remember the tone of the thing. I remember things that I can't tell you, because – It made a tremendous impression on me, I mean, as literature itself it opened up something for me. But the – It was very dramatic. It was at night, under there, and so the lighting and so on under the Studies Building was – It was part of the campus we didn't use very much. So when we did use it, it was quite striking. It got used one other time in an extremely striking way.

**SWM:** For a production?

**TM:** No. I don't know what to call it, but it was a kind of a general arts bash. Rauschenberg and Twombly had their stuff up, and it was when Ben – You were there, you must have been there.

**SWM:** I don't remember.

**TM:** Ben Shahn was there, and – But Ben Shahn stayed on after you left, so I don't know. Maybe Motherwell stayed on some more. No?

**SWM:** He left, I think, at the end of the summer.

**TM:** I'm probably mistaken. I'm probably mistaken about that. But in any case that whole – that was kind of a carnival, an arts carnival. There was all kind of marvelous work displayed, and they used – especially the way Rauschenberg knew how to use – I was very impressed with the way that he – He had a study across from mine one time, and he went out and gathered up all kinds of rusty things and so on and so forth and made a – decorated his studio with these kind of things. Of course, he had an eye for doing this, so it was beautiful. That production had many of those – There were many more people than cooperated in that than just Rauschenberg. Everybody – lots of people had



things in it. But they took – Again, most of it took place at night, and the lighting and so on, they used the stairwell up through the floor above and so on and so forth, and the studio of course down below, the weaving studio.

**MEH:** Where was the audience?

**TM:** Oh, there wasn't an audience. No, no, no.

**MEH:** Everybody was in the play.

**TM:** Well, that wasn't a play. (OVERTALK)

**MEH:** Oh, this a party you're talking about, now (OVERTALK)

**TM:** Yeah, it was a kind of a circus. I don't know. So that was – Everybody was a participant and an audience in that. No, the audience at the Cuchulain thing simply sat around. There was enough space there to accommodate the – It was a kind of a declaimed piece, and there was enough space to accommodate people for that. It wasn't a large cast and so on. But the atmosphere was marvelous for that, because the artificial lighting at night, with the background of the lake and, of course, all the frogs chiming in and so on and so forth.

**MEH:** So – in Arizona you had been largely unhappy because you couldn't do all of these different things that interested you?

**TM:** In Wyoming. (OVERTALK)

**MEH:** At Black Mountain you really could study whatever you wanted it seems.

**TM:** This is something I would like to see emphasized much more about Black Mountain as was – It wasn't an art school. That was kind of in a way factitious. It was what it intended to be. It tried to be a liberal arts – It tried to be a radical liberal arts, or a progressive liberal arts school and that's what it was. I mean

Duberman got it right when he – He didn't get the things right in the book, but that's beside the point, but he got it right when he subtitled his book: A Study in Community, because that was, that was a very important interest there. The amalgam of education – the relationship between education and community. Of course, it was a big bone of contention. An awful lot of the quarrels that occurred occurred because of people's judgment of what the mix should be. Of course people went – some people went all the way, that the mixture should include none of the other one [LAUGHS], both sides of it. So this was a cost (?) degenerator of a few upheavals and dissension there. But that's really what it was, was a community where people were hotly interested in things, white heat all the time, and they were interested in things. The distinction – There was a faculty and there were students, but the distinction between them was not all that, not all that important. There weren't boundaries. There really weren't boundaries.

**MEH:** Do you think that the conflicts, the disagreement, were productive? Or do you think it was really –

**TM:** Yeah. It was the essence of the place. Productive or not. I mean after all the place came flying apart finally, and it almost came flying apart several times along the way. So I don't know whether "productive" is the right word.

(OVERTALK) It was the very essence of the place. This is what – I mean, you know, there was no formal sociology there but, lord, you didn't need the bloody stuff. I mean political science and sociology, that was what, that was – you just looked and you learned a lot about (INAUDIBLE).

**MEH:** Do you think that the disagreements were more philosophical or personality conflicts, or both?

**TM:** Yes. Yes. Yes. [LAUGHTER] All of the above. I have, by the way – The very first year I was there, there was a great soul-searching thing, and they were looking around for a new – a rector. People came and they looked at this place and they shook their heads and walked away in disgust. Of course it was a money crisis, which was the usual thing there in any case, but this was a severe money crisis, which also, come to think of it, was not very unusual. But they were afraid they were going to dissolve then and there, and they suspended classes for – suspending classes, there's a silly idea anyway – but anyway, they suspended, they suspended the activities of the place for a week, two weeks, I forget how long, and had discussion groups. We all sat around tables, and I was the chairman of one of these groups. My table had at it Bill Levi and Ray Trayer. Well, you know so much. You probably know more than any of us about this. But Ray Trayer was the farmer and so you may say "Well, so what did he have to do with things?" Well he was an extremely important actor there and he was the chief – he was one of the main ingredients – He was a Quaker, and there was a big Quaker contingent there. He was one of the chief actors in a dispute which centered around Bill Levi and so on. In any case, so this – I was chair at this table that had these two people, and they were really the two bulls who were locking horns at the time. It looked like it was a matter of either I'm going or you're going. It came to the point where actually, after a faculty

meeting one night, Ray Trayer, the Quaker, punched Bill Levy in the nose. You know all of this.

**MEH:** I've heard. No, go ahead. Everyone tells it differently.

**TM:** Right. Well this is another version. Call it Stories of the Elephant, right?

[LAUGHS]

**MEH:** What was the issue then? Was that when they didn't want M.C. and Bill to be there or – ?

**TM:** Very much the story of what kind of – what should the direction of this place be. Again it was what should the weight be between community and college, what should the weight be between arts and liberal arts and fine arts – or arts and academic, right. I also took notes and I have transcripts – I have those notes. They're in (UNINTEL). I ran across them last year sometime, so you might be interested in those. I don't –

**MEH:** Yeah. I would be.

**TM:** Because those were at least what – For whatever degree of accuracy they have, they were done at the time. It was, in fact, some time after that Dan Rice and a few other people and I got together. We were going to plan our own college and solve all these darn problems. This place was too backward for us, and we were going to break off. Of course, we didn't have a chance.

**MEH:** That's while you were still there?

**TM:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I might even some notes. We wrote down that stuff. That's not as important. This other thing might be of more interest.

**MEH:** How would your school have been different? What were you dissatisfied with?  
Do you remember?

**TM:** I really don't remember. I would have to look to see what kind of notes I jotted down, because what I would remember about that now is how brash and naive such an attempt was. Probably it wouldn't have been different. It probably would have been exactly all the things that Black Mountain professed to be. We were very much impressed with that, and it was simply a low time in the fortunes of the college that even caused conversations of that kind. We all stayed on, a considerably long time after that and so on.

**MEH:** You graduated?

**TM:** I graduated, right, yeah. I graduated. I did the whole – That's something else that I – I don't mean to be self-serving about this, but it's something else that I would think that accounts of all of this would emphasize are the kind of education that was intended there. Not many people went through this in those ways, but this was a very interesting collection of ideas. I think there are a lot of educational lessons that could come out of this place that ought to be – rather than always John Caginess. Enough of that.

**SWM:** Mark graduated, too.

**TM:** Mark graduated, too. There was a difference between our graduation –

**SWM:** Was it the same year?

**TM:** Yeah. Same year, yeah. We had a choice of taking a degree or taking a certificate. We both were very reluctant to take degrees because that's what these people out in this other world did. We weren't going to do that. So Mark

stuck with that. He took a certificate. Dehn said, essentially he said to me, "Don't be naive." He insisted that I take a Bachelor of Science degree and so on. But yeah, I went through the regular program. It was a very interesting set of ideas as to – for graduation. It was very hard to do.

**MEH:** Going back, before you got ready to graduate, did you start studying with Dehn immediately? How did this relationship develop?

**TM:** Yeah, right away. Right, right away. He was an extremely attractive person, and first I started working with him and then we became very close friends. After a while I spent almost every day with him. Our classes were peripatetic. I had him all to myself.

**MEH:** That's incredible!

**TM:** Yeah. Because he's – Well, you probably know what kind of – his place in the world of mathematics. I didn't know that at the time.

**MEH:** Actually, I did a lot of reading at one point, and now in terms of his particular theories – but didn't somebody say that his theories had been disproven?

**TM:** No. No, no, no, no. That's a lot of nonsense. That's utter nonsense. He had a theorem which had an indirect proof. It happened to be an extremely important theorem, and the fact that he could even enunciate such a – It's a pillar of a branch of mathematics called topology, and it was finally – his proof was straightened out by Jerry Koplos (PH) at Princeton. It's called, usually it's called "Dehn's Theorem."

**SWM:** It's easier to say. [LAUGHS]

**TM:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. But he did an enormous amount of work. If you want to get some – Well, you see, the thing is you can say what, what the painters did and you can say what the musicians did, you can't tell people in general what somebody like Dehn did. But he was very important in mathematics. There were whole fields which he was essentially responsible for pushing off, and other fields that he made decisive changes in. So, this business of having a hole in a proof, I mean that's par for the course for mathematicians.

**MEH:** We'll do this interview, and if you write something, it would be good if this is the sort of thing that you could write that would really – somebody with the professional knowledge to define his importance, you know, to write down, this down.

**TM:** People there did not know who Max Dehn was. In fact there were fatuous things written. But for the most part he was a very nice – and people always said "little" because he was short. He was a very handsome man. I knew him as an old man, of course. He was a very handsome old man. But people were of course very impressed with what he knew, because he had a good solid European education and he was a man who was extremely well read. He was interested in very many things, and he was brilliant. So he had philosophical knowledge, and he had linguistic knowledge, as well as scientific knowledge outside of mathematics, and so on and so forth. He was responsible for gathering information about the kinds of orchids that grow in North Carolina, things like that, he was kind of a horticulturalist and he had, of course, a daughter who was a horticulturalist.

**MEH:** No, I didn't realize she became a horticulturalist.

**TM:** Well, that was her field. She was a teacher, but her field was horticulture. I'm sure that it was under the influence of her father.

**SWM:** That one is Maria?

**TM:** Maria, yeah. But people there, they liked Dehn a lot. He was a kind of an icon.

**MEH:** Everybody loved Dehn.

**TM:** Yeah, everybody loved him. Nobody really knew who he was, or his place in the world, or got close to his, what he was on about. He was, I think, temperamentally a Zen Buddhist, and so he rode with that. But I think that probably bothered him (INAUDIBLE).

**MEH:** In the earlier years, he was really – he was taking visiting professorships and I think he really would have liked to have been someplace where his – I mean there's no question that he loved Black Mountain, and he always came back, but I think he would have liked to have been in a different position professionally, where his importance would have been recognized and he would have been able to really – That's why I think it was extremely important to him in the later years to have some students who were serious about mathematics.

**TM:** Yeah. I think that partly the reason he went off to these places was for money. I mean, you know, people at Black Mountain were broke. They in particular.

**MEH:** But I think also from correspondence that he was, you know – .

**TM:** You – It must be –

**MEH:** He was very isolated at Black Mountain, intellectually.



**TM:** Of course. Of course, he was.

**SWM:** For a while I think Toni made the living for them. She worked in advertising and – right? Where was she, in Chicago?

**TM:** Chicago. She went to Chicago, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, that's undoubtedly the case. He did love Black Mountain. It was his kind of place. I mean he was – When he was in Germany he had a little hut in Norway, in the mountains. He would go hiking and skiing in Norway, and it was his sort of thing to do. My classes with him weren't classes at all. We went walking. We went walking in the mountains and talked about mathematics. We did that almost every day. We'd sit at the desk for a little while and do some things, and then off we'd go walking. He would talk to me – I mean this in a way fortifies your case. He would talk to me in a way that was – he probably wouldn't have talked to me if there hadn't have been a vacuum there and there hadn't been a desire to get outside of himself a little bit more, because I was awfully naive when I was there. I learned an enormous amount from him. Enormous amount. From the two of them. They took me in. They acted kind of as a father and mother to me. They took me in. Of course, Dehn died while I was there, but I was close friends with Toni ever afterwards, and she always – she came to our house at least once a year and so on and so forth, and we were always very very good friends. Unfortunate – I had a long conversation with – correspondence with her. Unfortunately I saved very little of that. I was never a good letter-keeper. I never saw a point to keeping letters, so I (OVERTALK)

**SWM:** But when she traveled, she always sent us postcards and –

**TM:** (OVERTALK) Yeah, I don't have too much of that. Of course, when she was at Black Mountain, a lot of that time, some of the time, some of the time, some of that would have been interesting to you because it filled in, you know, corroborating details.

**MEH:** Was Dehn's death at all expected?

**TM:** No. Absolutely unexpected. Toni was utterly, of course, chagrined, but furious about the thing because it had to do with something of the doctor making a wrong judgment. Some such thing as that. I –

**MEH:** It was an aneurysm, is that right?

**TM:** Yeah, yeah. Nobody expected that. I mean he was one of the strongest people there. He used to go on hikes and he'd leave everybody else behind. Right up till the day he died. I had just – I had just finished my thesis, and it was the first time I'd been away from Black Mountain in god knows how long. I went up to see this one in New York, and I just had gotten there and I got a telephone call "Come back, right away." By the time I got back, it was the very day.

**MEH:** So, you studied mathematics. What else – Did you have other particular focuses at the college? Did you take any – Go ahead.

**TM:** Yeah. I did everything. [LAUGHTER] Everybody did everything. You know, I'll tell you a story. [LAUGHS] There were these things [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION] Maybe I can remember the name now of this person. There was – in Greenville, I think it was. In Greenville, I think there was a woman's college.

**MEH:** Greensboro.

**TM:** Greensboro. They had [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION]

**MEH:** We're back on.

**TM:** Anyway, this is the story about Greensboro. Right now, Greensboro. They have some kind of an arts festival down there, I don't know whether it was every year, but maybe several of them. One year the Black Mountain contingent went down. I couldn't go down. I was – something I was doing at the school. I heard all these stories about it. But the Black Mountain contingent went down. Nick Cernovich went down, so he knows the story. There was the – this was all neatly – very un-Black Mountain. It was all neatly compartmentalized. This was the poetry section, this was the theatre section, the music section, the dance, so and so and so and so and so on. The poetry section, all the Black Mountain people would turn up. The music section, all the Black Mountain people. Every single one of these was swamped by the Black Mountain people. Every one of them was interested in everything. Of course different – and the rest of the people always had their little groups that came to these things. Of course we were very proud about that too, because we were an arrogant bunch.

**SWM:** [LAUGHS] No false modesty.

**TM;** But it was – Of course – That was one of the nice things. The boundaries, the boundary walls were so porous at Black Mountain that any time that a person had an interest, they participated. Participation was really the thing. The formal – The formal barriers were so slight. I mean I can't even remember registering for a class or anything like that. You went. Somebody was doing something? You went. If you could contribute, you contributed. So there was even, you

know, this meshing between who was doing the teaching and who was doing the learning. I had – Flola Shepard was there. I liked Flola a lot. She was a cold fish, but I liked her a great great deal. She was very active in civil rights kind of things when she was there, and I was her chauffeur. We went to all these places and they stuck us in jail and things like that, all that sort of stuff. But at any rate I – she insisted on very formal classes with grades, and that was nice because she was probably the only person at Black Mountain who did that, you know. Nobody else ever thought of formal classes or grades. I mean, you know, formalizing the classroom, register your students, you get a grade, you take a test, and so on. Nobody else did that. But I took linguistics with her and I studied French with her for almost all the time I was there. Then I studied Russian with Madame Goldowski, and that was a marvelous experience. I used to go in the afternoon for tea. We would sit down at her table and she'd have me do a few chores for her both before and afterwards [LAUGHS]

**SWM:** She liked the boys to come around and –

**TM:** Nobody knew how old she was. She could have been anywhere from seventy to a hundred, but she was a very beautiful woman, extremely beautiful woman. Natasha's mother, of course. I would have tea and something to eat with her and then we would do our Russian. She would recite for me great yards and yards of Pushkin poetry and things of that kind. That was very very nice. I still remember something. I was good friends with Natasha. We talked a lot. Mostly I would go and have conversations with her. I never took anything.

**MEH:** You didn't take a class?

**TM:** I didn't take any courses from her, but we'd have conversations about what, the things she was very much interested in at the time, that is the things in physics that she was very much interested in. She would produce some papers at the time and we talked about those kinds of things. I was close with Paul Leser. I never had any classes. I was – went to some occasion when he gave a class every once in a while, but mostly I went and talked with him. I was very much interested in anthropological kinds of things, and I used to have talks with him. So I learned a great deal from him. Lou Harrison I actually had a class with of sorts, but I spent a lot of time – I played a musical instrument and we used to sometimes play together. I spent a lot of time talking with Lou, and I learned a lot from him. I told you before I was in Pete's percussion group, and when Lou Harrison came, we were going to have a performance and I was the only percussionist for this performance.

**MEH:** What type of instruments were you using, making –

**TM:** Well, pipes and all kinds of improvised things. I played, I don't know at the time, I was responsible for about six different things there. There were five or six. Jay Watt, we were performing a piece written by Jay Watt. It actually never got performed, but it – I mean as a formal performance. We certainly practiced it for a long, long, long time, and then Jay Watt decided we weren't going to perform it. So he had a big party for us all. We all came to the big party. [LAUGHS] Lou conducted. Well, and then dance. I danced, I told you, with Katy, and Merce and I. I liked that very very much.

**MEH:** What do you remember about Katy? What was she like?

**TM:** Very cold. Katy Litz was a very cold person. Very formal. A good teacher. Extremely good teacher. Well-organized, well-disciplined. An interesting dancer. She performed a lot there for us, and very interesting dancer. Innovative. I don't know really what more to say about her than that. I liked Katy. But she was – She was an icy kind of a person. I mean other people would judge differently about that. I don't know. Hazel Larsen and I were very close friends there, and –

**SWM:** Did you study with her? Did she give classes?

**TM:** I studied with her. I learned one heck of a lot from Hazel Larsen. Yeah. No, we were just together a lot. You know, of course, she had to be carted every place. I was one of the few people who could drive there, and I used to take her in a little weapons carrier left over from the war there, and I drove that thing – I carted her around to various places, and I used to help, so I used to spend a lot of time at her house and talk. She did the diagrams for my thesis. Very beautiful, extremely beautiful diagrams, probably the best, one of the best parts of my thesis. Her diagrams. She spent hours doing that (INAUDIBLE).

**SWM:** Who made the folder? Toni or Jalo?

**TM:** Toni – Jalo made the folder for it.

**SWM:** Sort of a bookbinding.

**TM:** Yeah, yeah. Nick stole the paper for me. It was beautiful paper.

**MEH:** From whom or where did he steal it? You can tell now.

**TM:** There was a – Well actually what he did was to steal it from Black Mountain, from the printing house, from the printing shed, or whatever you want to call

that. Actually I went – He was – some big project that they were doing, and the printing house was really running. He went to Black Mountain to – there's a papermaker in Black Mountain, a big, a manufacturer, commercial manufacturer that did paper. But he went and chose this very – It's very beautiful paper. I still have some of this. It's marvelous looking paper, all these striations and so on and so forth. He got enough too for this project, and there was some left over so he just very cavalierly gave it to me. [LAUGHS]

**SWM:** That's what friends are for.

**TM:** I also worked on the farm about oh half to three-quarters of the time I was there, because the only way I could have stayed – I had – After I gave them all my money the first year, I had no more money, and so I worked on the farm. Since I'd had a lot of experience – I grew up around ranches and all, I mean I had a lot of experience of that kind of thing, and I'd been out working, which a lot of those people hadn't, and I knew about that sort of thing, so I was useful to them on the farm. I was the only person in fact they ever paid on – student that they ever paid. They hired me. Ten dollars a month. Well, I had to have something.

**MEH:** Was the farm really functioning then?

**TM:** Oh yeah. Oh very much so. It was the most productive days of the farm. Doyle Jones was the farmer. Ray Trayer had left. When Ray Trayer had the farm, it was – he ran a very good farm, but it was – in some ways it was supposed to be part of the college, and part of the college education. The girls would come up in their shorts and pitch the hay until they got all scratched up and then

they'd run away. But it really did have that much to do. But when Doyle Jones came, it really – thanks to Doyle Jones and Victor Sprague – I'm going to ask you about him because I've completely lost track of him. I liked Vic a lot. He probably died of alcoholism, I suppose.

**MEH:** I'm not su- – . I can't remember right now whether I've been in touch with him.

**TM:** I have to be careful, don't I.

**MEH:** It's okay.

**TM:** He was a lovely guy. A very sad, sad fellow.

**MEH:** What was he teaching?

**TM:** Biology. He was a biologist. (OVERTALK) Some reputation. He was not a giant, but he had some reputation, and he worked. He was also – he was from rural Georgia. He was a real Georgian, mountain fellow. So, he was kind of a diamond in the rough. But he really took hold with all of the – a lot of the physical things at Black Mountain in the farm, and he helped Jones make that farm, and I have to say I helped too. I was [LAUGH] – I worked almost full time there –

**SWM:** And Stan too?

**TM:** Stan, no. Stan worked on the farm. He was the one that I started working with. That was when Ray Trayer was still there, and then when Ray left Stan stopped working at the farm and I was the one who was the – I was sort of the assistant farmer there, I guess you'd have to say.

**MEH:** What was the farm producing then?



**TM:** Pigs. We had a dairy herd, so milk – all the milk for the college, for example, and cream. Eggs. We had a flock of chickens and so eggs, all the eggs for the college. We raised, of course, corn for feed for the animals and sometimes enough for extra. I think they sometimes sold corn. We raised huge numbers of vegetables, and that was really the enterprise that Doyle Jones and Vic Sprague really got started and got students involved in that, and there came, of course, students who knew something about that sort of thing. So we opened up garden areas that had never been opened up there before.

**MEH:** What vegetables were you raising?

**TM:** Oh beans and, I don't know – just – I mean I just named what we have here in our garden. I don't know. That really helped the college economy enormously, so an awful lot of our food – It came at a time when the college was having tremendous difficulties financially, and there was really no money to buy very much of anything. That really furnished us things. Doyle was also liaison. He was from the Valley there. He was a local fellow. He knew all the people, and that gave us a kind of an in with the locals, so we started having cooperation with local farmers. Maybe Ray had some of this, but I don't think so. I think that was probably new with Doyle. For example, they rented me out. I went out and worked plowing and tilling people's fields and doing haying for people and so on and so forth, and in exchange sometimes they would come and help us. But we actually made money by my going out and working. This was what I did eight hours of the day and the other sixteen hours or whatever it was, I did Black Mountain stuff. I did my own work. The very last time, part I was there,

Dehn absolutely insisted that I quit the farm and work on my thesis full time.

That was lucky, because the timing just coincided with his death and it just fit exactly. But anyway, so the farm became a very big thing. They got, actually got a beef herd, which was a tremendous fiasco, it turned out. It was a tremendous financial loss. That was financed by Paul Williams.

**MEH:** I think the farm went down pretty quickly after you left. By the summer of '53 I think it was in very bad shape.

**TM:** Yeah. Well, the whole place I think went down. Very – just down the drain, yeah. It was – Yeah.

**MEH:** But up until you left in '52, the plant was still in pretty good shape (OVERTALK) – .

**TM:** A vibrant going concern – the best it probably had ever been. We were going to get into the tobacco business, and I was sort of the straw boss on the job that put up the building, the tobacco sheds. A fat lot I knew about doing things like that, but nobody else knew I didn't know it, so it was fine. [LAUGHS]. Yeah, I'm sure that was a fiasco too. I'm sure everything turned, I think, turned sour.

**MEH:** Why do you think? You can be honest.

**TM:** Turn off the cameras and I'll tell you.

**MEH:** Go ahead and tell me. Do you really want me to turn the cameras off?

**TM:** Well I think it was Wes Huss and Charles Olson as much.

**MEH:** I agree. That's okay.

**TM:** I think that was – They were a disaster for the rest (?) –

**MEH:** I was going to ask you, because of all the people you've mentioned, you hadn't mentioned Charles Olson.

**TM:** I had a lot to do with Charles Olson. I disliked him intensely, and I disliked the way he operated and I disliked the things he stood for and I disliked his academic – or his intellectual dishonesty. I disliked the way he handled people. But, of course, he was a god there, and he had a huge following, and he probably in some sense did a lot of good. I also don't think he was a very good poet, but that's another strike (?).

**MEH:** How, why do you say you dislike the way he handled people? What do you mean by that?

**TM:** Well I think he, he kind of walked over people. He was insensitive I think to people. He was a Me-Firster, he was Charles Olson first. When I left Black Mountain to go to Chapel Hill, I had to – He'd borrowed my typewriter and he kept my typewriter. My typewriter was sort of my right hand. I had to break into his house and steal the thing back. [LAUGHS] He was – I thought he was a very selfish man, extremely selfish (INAUDIBLE). An ego, a tremendous ego, tremendous ego. A self-destructive man, of course.

**SWM:** In the library at York University where Truman teaches, I was once looking through I can't remember what particular documents or magazines, and there were a lot of Charles Olson letters that had been published from the time he was at Black Mountain. He really showed a profound kind of sneering attitude –

**TM:** Contempt.

**SWM:** Contempt for the students that he was with. It seemed so two-faced to me, because I remember the way he acted at the time. Then I saw the things he had written about, and it just – It didn't set well. I just –

**TM:** I don't know what Mary Fitton's told you about her dealings with Charles Olson, but he certainly di- – . Well, women in general, he treated badly, and he didn't foster her. I think in a way she was a casualty of Olson. She was very talented, and everybody there realized that she was – recognized her talent. Olson made no – no effort to draw that out. Mary offers a kind of measured evaluation of Charles Olson. She recognizes the debt, but I don't think she tells the whole story about the damage that I think was done to her there.

**MEH:** Did you feel that you were really – in terms of feeling that he was manipulative or major ego or not good for the college, were there other people who shared those feelings?

**TM:** Yes. Yes, there probably – Yeah, yeah there were. Not probably. There were, sure. Sure, there were other people. There were definite – There was a coterie. There was an Olson coterie. There were the people who depended on him, and they depended on him for long after Black Mountain. They made careers out of this. [LAUGHS] Yes, I know people who were not very pleased with the way he did things, the way he handled things and so on. I never could figure out whether Huss manipulated Olson or Olson manipulated Huss. That was a – I went away with that as a mystery. Most of the times I thought that I knew, but I kept changing which one it was that I knew was the case.

**MEH:** I think the case probably changed.

**TM:** It might have done so. Wes Huss came as kind of a savior to the place, and I think he was –

**MEH:** How was that?

**TM:** Well, they were looking for a – He came as, was it a treasurer or what? He didn't come as a rector did he?

**MEH:** No, he came as a drama teacher.

**TM:** No, but that's – No, no, no, no. He came – He did. He taught drama there. But that's not – That was a – He'd been in – What was this theater in Pennsylvania, this stock –

**MEH:** I can't remember. I know what you're talking about. I can't remember the name.

**TM:** A pretty name, actually. I can't quite remember it. But he'd just come from that. He had a long association with the theater. But they hired him as – to take – I can't remember, the Treasurer was another Quaker.

**MEH:** Not Pittinger. That was earlier.

**TM:** No, Pittinger was – No, he was –

**MEH:** Not Adams, not –

**TM:** No, Adams was later.

**MEH:** I can't remember.

**TM:** It doesn't matter. But no, he was hired as the – Did they hire him as a rector or treasurer. I don't know what his title was. He was the person in the office. He was the Chairman of the Faculty.

**MEH:** He was treasurer, but I wasn't aware – Unless I've forgotten. I'd have to check the minutes. But he was really –

**TM:** [OVERTALK] That's why he came. He was hired for that. The drama thing was sort of an additional kind of thing, and of course he did a lot with that when he was there. I did some stuff with him. We did some stand-up readings of Molière, for example. That was the first thing. Then he did a Kafka thing. I was in that. Some other things. I don't quite remember that. But no, his job was to – he was the administrator there, whatever. Whatever the title was, treasurer or rector, I don't think, but he was the administrator and that's what he was hired for. He was in the office, the person who was In the Office was the Administrator, and there was always such a person. He was a strange fellow. Strange. At first he always seemed rather weak to me, and kind of feckless sort of a person. He was changed later. He seemed to have a very strange power over Olson that I never could understand. There was a strangeness there. First I simply thought he was a sycophant that – , but later on I could understand it. Maybe that's just what I saw. I don't know. Other people saw things, similar things about him.

[LAUGHS]

**MEH:** Who were other people? I know that in the earlier fifties there was a division between the Quakers who had come and other –

**TM:** Yeah, the Quakers were there. I don't know when the Quakers came, by the way. I think they came after the War. They came before I came.

**MEH:** Well, they came at different times. But I think – Ray Trayer was a –

**TM:** [OVERTALK] I mean the potter –

**MEH:** Robert Turner – . He came in '49.

**TM:** Turner. He came later – No.

**MEH:** Yes.

**TM:** Because he came after I came. Well, in '49. Okay.

**MEH:** He came in the fall of '49. Definitely.

**TM:** But he came a little later than I came.

**MEH:** Okay, he may not have been there –

**TM:** I was there when he came. (OVERTALK) I remember –

**MEH:** He may have come later in the semester, but he –

**TM:** He appeared after I was there, and I had been there a little while.

**MEH:** But who were the Quakers? The Hetheringtons –

**TM:** No, no. Hetherington? They were – Hetherington might have felt sympathy, but Hetherington and his – Well, they – Maybe he was a – His wife, his wife was Armenian. I mean, I realize that has nothing to do with being a Quaker or not, but I think of them rather differently. Warrington. Warrington was the treasurer. I can't remember a first name, but he was a Quaker. He taught – he was not the treasurer. He was the treasurer. He taught in the print shop. He taught printing and things of that sort.

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**