

Interviewee: ROBERT MARDEN
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION] How, Bob, did you hear about Black Mountain College?

RM: Well, I was on Cape Cod building scenery and eventually acting in an amateur outdoor theater. We had asked for volunteers, and one of them was Leslie Paul, who had finished her first year at Black Mountain. She eventually, being much more talented than most of the rest of us, worked at the Cape Playhouse. But she told me the glowing stories of Black Mountain. I was at a dead end, I felt, in art school at Boston, because I was very strapped for money, and I was trying to get something to earn a living with, but I wasn't that good. I was okay. Good in art. Also, I was quite sure we were going to get into the War shortly, and I thought I might have some good experience before that. So, I applied to Black Mountain in the fall of 1941, with virtually no money. I think the church scraped up a hundred dollars or something.

MEH: The church?

RM: Our church. Not the church. Second Congregational Church of Newton.

MEH: That's interesting that they would help a student go to college.

RM: Well, we had a wonderful, wonderful pastor at that time. He was sympathetic towards me because my father had been very active in the church before he died. Then he died when I was about twelve, so my mother was a struggling single mother way back before it was fashionable. So, in September I hooked up with Jimmie Jamieson and a bunch of other people who drove down. I think it was that first fall – September. Black Mountain was just a wonderful place. I had all sorts of new experiences. I got very active in the Work Program. By the end of October I was co-director of the Work Program in my first year, which was somewhat daunting.

MEH: Let's go back a little bit before you got to Black Mountain. You are from Newton, Massachusetts?

RM: Yes, I grew up in West Newton.

MEH: Did you go to public schools or private schools?

RM: Newton High School. Very highly reputed. Now there are two – Newton North and Newton South. But I was not an outstanding student, except in a few topics like history. But I'd been doing the art school thing in Boston.

MEH: This was at the Museum?

RM: No. The Vesper George School of Art. I don't know if it's still extant. I don't think so. George was the patriarch, and he'd left the scene by '39 when I started. So, I had two years of art school. But one of my predecessors at Vesper George was the fellow who wrote Make Way For Ducklings. Do you remember the children's book about the ducklings going across the street in downtown Boston? Well, that was a pretty tough act to follow. He was really talented. So,

that was my background. I was really quite sure we were going to get into the War in two or three or four years and just saw this chance and grabbed it.

MEH: Okay. You rode down with Jimmie Jamieson.

RM: Yes, and a bunch of other people. I can't remember who else, but it was four or five people driving all night and all day in the old roads, through the center of Baltimore and the center of Washington and the center of Alexandria and so on, down to High Point, I think is where we cut off and took the route west to Asheville now through – up the Interstate, which at that point it was definitely not interstate.

MEH: Do you remember your first impression of the college? Your arrival?

RM: Well, of course, the scenery was overwhelming. The site was just so gorgeous, with all the mountains on all sides. I grew up . Before my father lost his job with Metropolitan Life, during the Depression, we had a summer place up in Vermont right on the edge, the New York side of the Green Mountains. So, I loved that. But the local dialect really floored me. It took months before I could understand. We had three – On the construction projects we had three local fellows: the boss carpenter, a plumber, and an electrician. All the rest of the work was done by faculty and students building the Studies Building. That was substantially it, but the structure was completed, the long wing of it. I don't know if they ever added on to the front part. But there was nothing inside except I guess there were studs for the studies. Each student had to finish their own study, put up the wall of plywood –

MEH: So, if you arrived in the fall of '41, the Studies Building basically was up at that point, but not finished?

RM: Yeah, not habitable. I don't think any of it was habitable at that point, unless it was the far apartment that Bob Wunsch, who was – what did they call him? Rector? I forget. The head of the faculty at the college. But I don't remember the timing. Essentially it was unfinished. Oh, I guess the art studios were in operation, because that was one of the main reasons I went down there, because Josef Albers was teaching.

MEH: Were you familiar with Albers at all?

RM: No, just by reputation.

MEH: Reputation from what Leslie had told you, or – ?

RM: Well, some of the materials that they sent us about the college spoke about all the various faculty and mentioned him, although I certainly wasn't much into the Bauhaus school at that point.

MEH: Instruction in Boston was traditional?

RM: It was just – I was a commercial artist, essentially, trying to develop a talent in that direction. As I say, I was quite confident that I could not see my life spent in that endeavor. At that point, well, I guess I never did envisage myself as a starving or otherwise fulltime artist's artist.

MEH: You took Albers' course?

RM: Oh, yeah. Sure. He was wonderful, a wonderful teacher. None of the students ever followed his own style. They picked up on color. Albers' big thing of color contrast. Then Bob Babcock was political science, and I really got in – That was

the first time I'd had anything of really professional quality. Of course, high school was pretty routine, and I eventually – Babcock lured me over to his field much to Albers' dismay. I majored in Political Science, and after the War, I came back. My brother-in-law was on the faculty at Harvard in Political Science – one of my brothers-in-law. I had four before my divorce. So, I applied to Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth and got accepted at all three, but Harvard had a lot of advantages because my wife's family lived in Watertown, so that gave us a base of operation.

MEH: So, going back to Black Mountain before we get away – What do you remember about Bob Babcock as a teacher? He's not a person I hear a lot about.

RM: Oh, well, I don't know. Babcock opened the whole range of really thorough American history but also political theory, which I had never even heard of until I got down there. Let's see. He didn't teach history. Eric Bentley taught history. Bob was essentially what you would call political science and government, which I eventually got a Ph.D. in at Harvard sometime later. But that just seemed – He was very much a hands-on guy. I mean, as we know, he later became Lieutenant Governor of Vermont, after being in the legislature for a while. He was also physically a very leadership type and very active with axes and all as leader of the Work Program. He was just a great influence on me.

MEH: How did he conduct his class? Was it the sort of thing you had at Harvard, with grades and tests and –

RM: Well, yes, they had to have some kind of grading system. I don't remember really. I do think that all of the exams were of the essay type, blue books, as they had at Harvard. But all the classes were, almost all of them were so small, you know, that they were seminar types, sort of a continuing seminar. I can't remember at the moment who else was taking these courses, but obviously – It was a popular course.

MEH: What do you remember – Oh, I'm sorry – Go ahead.

RM: Well, I struggled with French down there, but I didn't really learn much, unfortunately. My mother taught Latin and Greek, just after getting out of, getting out of the equivalent of high school in Pennsylvania when she was a young girl. But I couldn't – I was just not very good at languages.

MEH: Was Frances de Graaff teaching French?

RM: I think so. Yes. Frannie de Graaff. Some – I can't remember the guy with the fantastic record collection, which I didn't appreciate at the time. He taught Spanish. Mangold.

MEH: He had a jazz collection, didn't he?

RM: Yeah. Yeah. We now have – My wife is a fan, great enthusiast. She's my current wife. I married Helen Wright at Black Mountain. My current wife and I, we'll celebrate our twenty-fourth anniversary this December. So, now I've got two sons and two step-daughters.

MEH: Going back to Black Mountain again – That's okay, because I'll get to your Black Mountain wife and your marriage again. What do you remember about Albers' class?

RM: Well, there was the large art room in the lowest, the ground floor level of the Studies Building. There was enough room so that each of us had enough room to work on, for instance. He was trying to get our hands and mind and eye in coordination. I remember – I've seen them since – I don't remember doing them, but my ex-wife did a lot of very nice large alphabetical letters just to get the lines and the curves. I got into watercolor painting, primarily. I still have one painting from Black Mountain, at Black Mountain. That's also stored away somewhere, but it's a view – Because as you know, the climate is similar to New England really, so in the fall they have the great colors, maples and other trees. It's pretty spectacular. This particular one, watercolor, I painted – It had snowed while the trees were still in their bright color, but the Seven Sisters Mountains were all blue and snow-covered. It looked like New Hampshire. That's the sole – No, I've got a couple of oil paintings. I did some acrylics.

MEH: Did Albers encourage you to paint the landscape at all? Or was this independently?

RM: I don't really remember. I think I just liked doing it, got into that. Because I'd done some, some painting when I was still back in Boston at art school. The openness. The thing that hit me, and I was thinking about it recently, the thing about Black Mountain was that it opened up all these possibilities of choosing which way to go without any preconceptions. I got very enthusiastic as a carpenter, basically, and also clearing land for the farm, for the cows. But – was it Nelson Rockefeller, I think, gave BMC some cows to start a herd, Black Angus. Then also the – Of course, the whole concept of essentially the town

meeting style of governance of the college was fascinating to listen to. It took me a while to really get into it, but I did get into it pretty well. Then I – That was also my first experience at doing any sort of public speaking, even though it was a pretty small group. But in addition to the participation in the town meeting — Well, of course, the War in Europe was already started. I can't remember just when I started this reporting, but I had a briefing session every Sunday afternoon based on the New York Times, primarily, in which I had the updated battle maps. Of course, with the large refugee community, they were very much interested in that, in the summary of what had gone in the last week. So, I did that every Sunday until I was called. I wasn't drafted. I volunteered into the Air Force, but my – Because of the jam-up. [MUSIC GETS LOUDER, MIKE ADJUSTED] Ah hah! All right, well anyhow, so I did that. I, let's see, I got to be head of the student body during the summer, between the spring of '42 and the fall of '42. So, I'd volunteered into the Air Force, but I wasn't called up until March of '43. So, then I was in pilot training, but I turned out not to have the hand-eye-ear, hand-and-eye and so forth coordination to handle a plane. I did get – I soloed, and I could do spins and things like that, but when it came to the real acrobatic maneuvers, I just couldn't do it. I had to think your way through, and you can't do that, you know, in the air. Maybe as a – it might have been for bombers, but certainly not for little Stearman Primary Trainer 7, PT-7.

MEH: So, at Black Mountain you really became involved in the work program. What work was being done then?

RM: Well, everything. I mean the Studies Building – that was a major project. The two big lodges were pretty much done. They did have to do some plumbing and heating, but basically they were okay. But on the dining hall, at one stage, that's one of the pictures that I've mislaid, they put a big addition on it to the kitchen, to get more space for people there. Then we were building entirely new houses, one story houses designed by Larry Kocher, for some of the faculty. The Jalowetzes – I worked on that house. In fact, I killed a rattlesnake there on the back terrace of it, by dropping a rock on it and then cutting the head off with a hoe. (LAUGHS) There were other projects. Adding on to some of the older buildings that they'd inherited, up the road, up towards the barn.

MEH: How was the work organized?

RM: Well, (LAUGHS) we had a certain number of projects ongoing, and we tried to match people's likes and avoid their dislikes. Some liked to work on the farm, some – I was particularly active both in carpentry and in clearing the land for the fields up back of the farm, up the steep hill. I was also head of the fire department. For a while we had a – because Prior to the War they had the Civilian Conservation Corps unit stationed fairly close by. It might have been at Black Mountain, or somewhere in that area, who used to deal with forest fires, brush fires, in the whole valley leading all the way up to Mount Mitchell. Well, the War came ,and they dismantled that. We were the only effective firefighting force, so in addition to the somewhat primitive on-site fire control force in the college, we also would go out and tackle these brush fires [whenever we'd see the smoke [INAUDIBLE]]. We had one hell of a fire right above the barn, and I

remember getting trapped in the undergrowth – can't remember what the bushes is called [RM: rhododendron ?], but they're terribly thick. I had to crawl through about ten feet of it, about three feet above the ground, to get out. There was a fire lane, thank the Lord, on the ridge. But I had to get to that to get out of it, I was cut off.

MEH: How did you fight the fires? Buckets of water? Did you have hoses?

RM: No, we had Indian pumps. Those are five-gallon tanks that are like a backpack, and they have a hand-operated squirter like this. They're very effective. I've still got – I kept up that interest when I came up here to Massachusetts. I've still got an Indian pump.

MEH: From Black Mountain?

RM: No. (LAUGHS) No. So anyhow, I was at Black Mountain from September '41 through the next September, through April, I believe. Yeah, early April that I was called up. So I had a year and a half. Of course, the second year the faculty was – many of them, the American faculty, were leaving, going into various military activities. Ronnie Boyden went into the Naval Intelligence, I think. I can't remember specifically others, but I'm sure there were a number. Bob Babcock went into something, but I don't remember what.

MEH: Did you take Eric Bentley's course?

RM: Yes.

MEH: What was that like? What was he like as a teacher?

RM: Well, he was pretty good as a teacher. Of course, he had a very heavily slanted Communist Party perspective on everything. But he was a good teacher, and

he wasn't so dogmatic that you felt hemmed in. You'd just know on certain questions Eric would have this point of view. He could be difficult to deal with, to put it mildly. I remember vividly I was on the committee to set up a format for the college, not the catalogue but a brochure about the college with pictures and stuff, and text, and trying to set out its goals and how – about the concept of the college. The very last – the back page, was a picture of a stone chapel that had been built almost singlehandedly by one of the instructors, whose name escapes me now.

MEH: Bill Reed?

RM: Bill Reed, yeah. The last day, the morning that the copy for this brochure was to go to the press in Asheville, Eric threw an absolute fit over the title of that photograph of the chapel.

MEH: What was the – ?

RM: Because he didn't want any reference to religion. He said he would resign if – He would resign if we had any reference to any, anything about religion in reference to this chapel. Well, I think he was the only faculty member there, and we didn't have more than half-an-hour. We didn't have a chance to get a referee on this stupid dispute. So, we finally caved in so we could get the copy off on time. He was quite blustery about that. But, you know, he covered the basics in European History of which I was, at that point, totally totally ignorant. I guess I'd just had American History in high school, so I began to get some feel for what had been going on in the rest of the world before and outside of the United States. Then there was a course in philosophy by our psychiatrist –

MEH: Straus?

RM: Straus, yeah. Ja! I drew a caricature – well, it wasn't so much a caricature, it was a portrait of him in action. Unfortunately, I lost it, because it really was an excellent little about 2 x 2 sketch. But he was, he was also – I guess he was the one who got me into Plato, actually, because I don't think we did much on Plato in Babcock's course. So, that must have been in Straus' philosophy course. That was quite large, as I recall. There was a long table, must have been maybe twelve or fourteen people in that course. It was in the evening, once a week, but heavy reading in between. Fortunately, I'd been brought up by my mother to read both fast and capably, getting the content. A lot of the people coming in there, they were dumbfounded when they were asked to go through a philosophy book about two inches thick. So, I did a great deal of reading. English was with Wunsch – writing. I think that in writing I was okay, definitely not my strong points but I could do it.

MEH: Did you work with the theater at Black Mountain at all?

RM: No. They gave up on me on acting, because I could not shake out my rather rigid, New England, Yankee upbringing. I couldn't break into other characters. I know they tried me on the story up in the Vermont Hills, the guy who goes crazy. I can't pull up the title of – it recently came out in a movie. But in any event, I worked on the scenery, did a really – a darn good set, considering the limitations. We had virtually no money to work with for The Time of Your Life, including a real working pinball machine that would go all wild colors when you hit the jackpot. The Missouri Waltz. I remember one of the girls was playing that

underneath the table, while I was getting ready to set off the pinball machine. It was – A fairly easy thing was the bar scene – tables, and –

MEH: This was in the Dining Hall?

RM: Yeah. The Strauses were in that one, and – can't remember, really, who was in it, else. But – So that was, that was the limitations – But they did some wonderful productions, very, very imaginative. Then, of course, the music was always good, so many performers. The ballet, the people who did The Green Table – Fritz –

MEH: Cohen and Elsa Kahl?

RM: Yeah, they were there. So, that was – That again was a total, an area that, which I was not. I guess I'd read about it, but I certainly hadn't seen any dance, and that was wonderful. Then Fritz Hansgirk –

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

MEH: What do you remem – What do you (INAUDIBLE)? [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION]. What do you remember about the dance? You didn't do it – the music.

RM: I didn't do it, no, I wasn't involved. I just watched. I can't remember too much except that it, you know, I've followed it to some extent since. But they were both such exciting people. Obviously, they had a number of acolytes who did their thing, and then piano playing – there was a gal whose name escapes me.

MEH: Was Maude Dabbs, was she there then?

RM: No, no. This was something like Rosabeth or something like that.

MEH: Ruthabeth.

RM: Ruthabeth?

MEH: There was a Ruthabeth there.

RM: Now, for some of the people like that, this gets back to the work program. Their practicing was counted as work – their work. For one thing, you didn't want to louse up a pianist's fingers hammering shingles.

MEH: What do you think was the effect of poverty on the community? The lack of monetary means?

RM: Well, of course, as long as we got – we got well fed, you know, wonderful chef, Jack, and his wife. There was – Everybody was tight. I remember on the material they sent out to prospective students, they said that you could get along, although not very well, but you could get along on ten dollars a month spending money. That included clothing, that included records and anything like that. But, of course, some were much better fixed than others. I had grown up in relative poverty since my father had died, so it wasn't all that different for me. But I assume obviously that the severe impact was on faculty, who didn't get paid very much. On the other hand, they didn't – many of them, particularly the ones coming in from Europe, had no place to hang their hat, and they were happy – I do remember the Hansgirgs, however, obviously had a substantial income prior to his being put on parole, because – Let's see, was he a Hungarian, or Austrian maybe. I forget, but he'd been in this country many years. Well, they had an Oriental rug in their apartment, some very nice things. If there was a party, it would be very well served. But it was sort of a way of life. I mean, the whole – the intent, the impact was more on, you know, what you did

with your head and your hands. The limitations were on materials, what you were doing. It all depended on what you were doing. I know that it must have been quite difficult. On the other hand, they did have a tremendous network of Friends of the College that were contributing, either in cash or in kind, like the Black Angus cows. I think it was Nelson Rockefeller who sent those. Or was it somebody else?

MEH: It was a foundation, and I don't know why I can't think of the name right now. But it was of that same period, I think. But I may wrong. Maybe he did –

RM: I thought it was somebody who had his own farm, but it might not have been Nelson Rockefeller.

MEH: Was this Caumsett Mountaineer or whatever, the bull?

RM: I haven't the – That – I never got that close to – The farm, I mean I helped but I was not big in the farming or dairying or any of the other good things that we did, except clearing the land. I do know, I remember when we built the barn, we used live trees for the main supports of the two-story barn, the bark was still on the trees. They just cut them and just put them up and built around them.

MEH: Did you build with green wood like that? Just a tree trunk?

RM: I don't know. Maybe if it's – Of course, they were all cross-braced so they couldn't wobble. It does sound rather strange, now you bring it up.

MEH: The barn's still there.

RM: The barn's still there. I remember we had a square dance for all the people in the Black Mountain valley, when it was opened, when I was first there before there were any cows inhabiting the lower story. That was fun. But, of course,

we had the War pressing in on us too, from the outside. There was so much concern about what was happening, particularly since in the first years we were losing. It wasn't – Well, I guess the Russians were beginning to make some headway in counterattacking before I left, but not an awful lot. The spring of '43 was still pretty grim. Then there were the concerns about what had happened to who – which ones had left. I can't remember casualties, while I was there. I know Roman Maciejczyk went into the Air Force as a navigator, and his plane crashed on takeoff out of New Mexico or Arizona, somewhere. But I can't remember the timing of that, whether I just heard about that later or whether – I don't remember the names of particular people from the college being casualties while I was still there. What other areas – ?

MEH: Okay, what do you think – First, before we go there, did you work with Larry Kocher much?

RM: To some degree, because he was the sort of main chief of the construction, from the technical side, the architectural design. I did not get into that, into actually studying with him, although I later became pretty active in it, I think, you know, given under the circumstances I might have gone for architecture, but it was a problem of funds for college before they had a GI Bill of Rights. It would just seem hopeless to support going into a place that had a School of Architecture – for me, so I simply didn't get involved. The house that my first wife and I built in Weston, we had a sort of a battle back and forth between the architect and me, plans and alternative plans. I think the third one was reprinted in a book called The House, by an architect named Robert Woods Kennedy, as

an example of something like: "This is a client proposal of almost professional capacity." I had the three elevations and the site plans and all of that worked out. But no, so it was mainly through that activity. Can't remember now too much.

MEH: Do you think that the college worked as a community? You said that you –

RM: It worked very well the first year I was there. It was clear in the second year, as the War sucked away a number of the leading American faculty into the Armed Services or some related activity – and also the older students – so that you didn't have the experienced leadership in working through the town meeting. You had a lot of first-year students and some faculty came in to replace – I can't remember. I don't think Fritz Hansgirg, for instance, was there the first year I was there. Of course, among other feats he had accomplished the process for getting magnesium out of seawater, and, of course, as a very advanced physicist he couldn't understand why we mere mortal students couldn't grasp the great basic concepts of physics, which were for him very very simple. I sort of staggered through physics. But getting back to your question, I could see some serious practical problems raising their head as you had a group of more and more novices trying to run what is really a pretty complex social structure. It wasn't that they were any less bright or less interested, but they simply hadn't had the experience. Some people – Of course, at times it was pretty tedious for the whole group trying to get a consensus. That was the great objective, to get everybody to agree. Well, with that aggregation of people, you never would get them all to some point. It's like in Town Meeting up here in Ipswich when people

get irritated enough at people, at the speakers going on and on, somebody'll say, "Move the question!" and that shuts off debate. You have to take a vote, even though some worthy people may not yet have spoken. So, I could see problems ahead at Black Mountain, and I guess they emerged. But I was getting my knowledge from my wife, Helen Wright, through letters, because we wrote each other quite a bit. I got a sense of what was going on, but it was more in an anecdotal sense than an analytic sense.

MEH: What do you think was the effect of landscape, the landscape on the college? You touched on that before, but –

RM: Well, the openness of it was – the fact that while there were buildings, they were sort of lost. They didn't loom the way you would in an urban college, or even one, you know, a less heavily urbanized area like some of the colleges up in New Hampshire. They're set in a bigger setting. We didn't have any buildings of that scope except for the Studies Building. Is there some operation going on there now, in the real estate?

MEH: Yes, it's a boys' camp. I'll tell you later.

RM: I just wondered. Did they ever add anything on to the Studies Building at the front entrance, other than the main stem?

MEH: [NEGATIVE]

RM: That was it, huh. There were two other Y's that were supposed to go out. I never knew.

MEH: They were never constructed. Did you ever leave the campus to go into town – to Asheville or Black Mountain?

RM: Oh, yes, yes. We could walk down and pick up the bus on the main road to Asheville. Black Mountain, there wasn't really much to Black Mountain then. It was a very small southern town. I can't recall spending any time ever that I can remember in Black Mountain, the town itself. But it wasn't terribly quick to get to Asheville. I do remember on my first solo bus trip, I ran into segregation on the bus. I had no idea, you know. Coming from Boston, I'd never heard of it. There were a whole lot of seats in the back of the bus. Everything else seemed pretty crowded. I walked to the back of the bus, almost, and sat down and the bus driver came on up, "You goddam Yankees, you're trying to upset everything. I'll throw you off the bus if you don't move up." Well, I moved up. I didn't want to particularly get thrown off the bus halfway to Asheville. He was quite aggressive. My action certainly wasn't deliberate. I was just trying to find a place to sit.

MEH: Was integration being discussed at the college, do you remember?

RM: Oh yes, quite a bit. There was constantly the tension of our making some modest moves at having a mixed, a mixed – There were black students there. Not many. I can't specifically remember, but I know that we were sort of uneasy, not about inside the college, but people coming in might get upset. But I don't recall any problems about that. Strange you would think – Well, of course, it wasn't such a – We were in such a set system that you really couldn't do much to challenge it.

MEH: What about the refugees? Were you aware of the seriousness of their plight?

RM: No. They tended – They didn't talk very much about it. I think they were so overwhelmed by what was happening in Europe that they didn't speak much about it. I mean, we knew they'd got out in advance of Hitler, but that was only natural. Who would want to stay if they could get away? But I don't think, I don't recall much discussion about the German pressure on the Jews, as such. Just they were generally nasty to everybody.

MEH: You said they were nasty to everybody – you were referring to the Germans?

RM: I mean, yeah, the Germans. Wherever the Nazis moved in, they were awful. Of course, with older people, like most of the refugees were, getting away from that at a great rate.

MEH: Do you have any particular memories of the Jalowetzes?

RM: Just that they were lovely people. Of course – I think Mrs. Jalowetz ran the library, if my memory serves me. Oh, wait a minute –

MEH: Nell Rice ran the library.

RM: Yes, Nell Rice ran the library.

MEH: Did you have the mica mine while you were there?

RM: That had started. That was one of the reasons Hansgirg was paroled to do I don't know exactly what – figure out better ways to mine it, or use it – Yes, I remember the whole – I never actually walked up to go into the mine itself. It was working during the second year. It must have been the season beginning in September '42, sometime during that year it was opened up. But I know we were seeing what we could do to help the War effort. Of course, that was another thing you spoke earlier about, did the atmosphere of poverty impinge?

Well, with rationing, everything, everybody was impoverished in a way. I mean you just felt constrained about stuff. We were lucky to have a farm so we didn't have the constraints on dairy products. I'm sure it wasn't planned for that reason, but it certainly made a difference.

MEH: You had ration books then?

RM: I can't remember. I think maybe that the ration books of all the students were put in a pot for the use of the college as a whole, because I certainly don't remember the stamps and stuff like that, which civilians normally were having to deal with.

MEH: You met your first wife at Black Mountain.

RM: Yes. Helen Wright, yes. She was also a first-year student. Came out of the Cambridge School in Weston. A lovely person, at that point. So, we got married just before I went on my pre-overseas furlough. Then I was in the European Theater, at first, in England with the Air Force, and then in – I guess I trans-, I was put into this weird outfit called the 27th Air Transport Group, which was a sort of a private air force that an entrepreneurial colonel had put together by supplying the transport aircraft that shuttled between London and somewhere near Oxford and up to Scotland to carry the incoming officers off the convoys that came into northern Scotland. Greenock, was the port, and there was an airport somewhere around Edinburgh. I never got up that far. Then he'd got together four squadrons of C-47 transports. Some of them still had the desert camouflage paint. I got in as a technical draftsman. Fortunately, I never had to design an airfield, because I wouldn't have known what I was doing. I invented

a set of the graphics – to have these four squadron commanders fight over who was doing more with keeping the aircraft in service and all that sort of thing. But I finally wound up in Berlin when I shifted out of air transport, because there was a rumor we were going to go directly to Japan – "directly" being not by the United States but across Asia. I didn't want to get into that. I transferred. [FAINT VOICE]

MEH: Try to keep your voice up because there's a lot of competing noise.

RM: Okay. Any other leading questions?

MEH: Well, you left and then you and Helen Wright were married, and you went into the service. After service – She stayed at the college during the War, didn't she?

RM: Yes, yes.

MEH: I'm going to possibly talk to her. So after the War –

RM: Well, then of course, with the GI Bill I had the capacity to go to college wherever I wanted to. I had got this enthusiasm for political science and government from Babcock. Harvard had one of the best departments in that field and economics in sort of one big union there, in one of the buildings near Harvard Square. So, I picked out Harvard. They finally, after my first year of Harvard courses in which I had very adequate grades, they granted me partial credit for my time at Black Mountain. It was so experimental when I first came in. They said "Oh, uh-uh – " but they wouldn't give me any credit right off. But I finally did get it.

MEH: How did you do that?

RM: Well, after I proved out to be able to do the freshman courses adequately – A's and B's – they said, "Well, whatever you haven't already had to take, we'll give you credit for the BMC record or." Which got rid of my physics obligation. Then I went one summer – at least one, maybe two summers – so I was able to pick up a year. I got through the undergraduate program in three years, then continued on to a Master's and eventually a Ph.D. in government and taught there a couple of years as an instructor. Then I went into various kinds of government service, mainly with the State of Massachusetts. First off, I'd written my thesis on the governmental problems of civil defense in the nuclear age, and the basic issue was could you develop an effective civil defense system to deal with nuclear weapons. The hands-off attitude of Washington, which had prevailed in the First War, where the states were able to do their own thing virtually unhindered, and I showed persuasively, I thought, and apparently the readers did too, that either you had a nationalized, federalized civil defense system that really worked or you would have a hodge-podge of varying degrees of capability but none too great at the various state levels. The latter is what happened, and that, in fact, would have been the case had they ever had a nuclear war. But then I got into the – My case study was the Massachusetts Civil Defense System, which was headed by an ex-detective from the State Police, which was so incredibly nonexistent, except on paper. I wrote a study about that for what was called the Little Hoover Commission, which many states had in the 1960s. Massachusetts had one too, about how to make state government more effective. Well, by the time all this happened, I was teaching

at Harvard. But my paper somehow wound its way to the military aide to the governor, Christian Herter, at that time. He was a wonderful World War One veteran, originally, a pilot and then he'd gone up the ranks to general in World War Two. He was so appalled. He said, "God, get him in here!" So, I started to do the planning for the Massachusetts Civil Defense Agency. Three years. So, that started me in Massachusetts government. Then I did various things, consulting and so forth and got involved as an Education Chief. I taught at Harvard in the Graduate School of Education as a resident political scientist in training – school admin-, future school administrator. So, I bought into the 1969 effort at reorganizing Massachusetts State Government, which eventually resulted in getting the 354 state agencies that all directly reported to the governor – which, of course, meant they reported to nobody, except the big ones – into twelve Cabinet Secretariats of their several functions: Human Services, Environmental Services, and so forth. That went very well. Then I did a stint again with the Civil Defense Agency on natural disasters, because everybody finally agreed (a) we were certain to have a natural disaster, and you could do something about that, and it was very unlikely by that time of H-bomb that you could do anything at all about nuclear war. So I did some planning there. Then I got into the Department of Revenue finally, setting up their computerized data base, on local government [sanitation (?) UNINTELLI WORD]. One of the best. Not necessarily the – I just started it. Brighter people took over later on. So, I stayed with that until I retired. So, that was, you know, that's been my orbit – all going back to Bob Babcock.

MEH: Do you have a bio that you could send me, a resumé?

RM: Yes, I can give you a summary of all my various activities.

MEH: If you could write that down, so that it's –

RM: Oh, it's all printed. I'll send you a copy. Have you got a card so I know where to send it?

MEH: I'll give you my address before I leave. So, somewhere along the line, you and Helen Wright divorced.

RM: Yes, about sixty- – Well in the early sixties.

MEH: Did you have kids?

RM: Yes, two sons. One is in Colorado Springs, and one is manager of the Concord, Mass. Conservation Commission [acreage (?)] including the four hundred acres that my ex-, late ex-mother-in-law gave the town. She couldn't afford the taxes and didn't want to develop it. I don't think we could have developed it anyhow, because we didn't have a right-of-way through to the nearest town road. Aside from that she didn't – This is the land immediately back of Walden Pond. You stand on State Road in the park and look across to the railroad that Thoreau was so interested in watching, watching being built from Boston and Maine, Fitchburg Line, on the far shore, all the mount-, all the hills behind that, the whole side of the hill and down to the Sudbury River, which feeds into the Concord. So, he manages that and lives there and also about a thousand acres or more in other parts of Concord.

MEH: Looking back, I'm doing a lot of interviewing, a lot's been written about Black Mountain – do you think – Why do you think, or do you think Black Mountain is

really worth remembering? Do you think it was really unique in any way? Or
(OVERTALK)

RM: Well, there were, of course, there were a few soul-mate colleges, like – let's see, there used to be one out in Ohio we used to exchange people with occasionally. The one up in, started up in after the War in Vermont.

MEH: Bard?

RM: No. I don't think it was Bard. It had an extension service – unit – down here in Boston.

MEH: Not Bennington.

RM: No, no. Goddard.

MEH: Goddard's what I'm thinking of. Bard's on the West Coast.

RM: No, Bard is in the Hudson River Valley.

MEH: Goddard is what I was thinking of. I just talked to Will Hamlin there.

RM: Yeah, I was just going to say Will's –

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1; SIDE 1, TAPE 2 BEGINS]

RM: Well, I think it was primarily an accident of time and space. I think it was just the coincidence of history and opportunity and poverty (LAUGHS) and the intellectual and the Depression generating this, and also some of the ideas of the forceful character who started this all out – I can't remember his name.

MEH: John Rice?

RM: John Rice. But – and others that he attracted to a very offbeat and unique kind of place, and then – and then the coincidence of the War and the influx of the European faculty. Because certainly given the finances of the place, there were

only around 115 students, and many of them were like me. I was on full scholarship, essentially, for all the time I was there. Well, this is an admirable quality that certainly didn't make for fiscal sanity. So, I – you know, people in academia now view it as basically a total aberration. The only thing where it might have had an influence to some degree, and I don't know enough about the history of higher education whether the ideas of a collegial authority of the faculty might have washed off into other colleges. Berea. Berea, wasn't that – ?

MEH: Berea (UNINTEL).

RM: That was the one I was trying – Then the one in Yellow Springs, Ohio. There was some correspondence although certainly nothing like the same thing. Of course, I felt after the War where it had swung over so radically to arts and English poetry that it was getting terribly narrowly based. All I can say, it must have been hell to try and run that kind of an operation with what I gather was the nature of some of the people who were there (LAUGHS). But it was certainly an exciting place. Stimulating. But I don't think it could last where it narrowed its focus down. There is a book on the postwar history of it, which I've read, I think. It's hardly – it's like a dark hole, inward collapse down into this pit of managerial incompetence. Of course, I'm very managerial in mind, having tried to manage [art (?)] in a way, a state government of sixty (sixteen?) thousand people. I was Chief of Planning for Massachusetts at one point, setting up of a cabinet system after that got going. Chief of Planning here, and then I became President of the National Association of State Planning. So I got around.

MEH: Why don't we order our food (UNINTEL) Speak up because –

RM: Nobody hardly can believe this story.

MEH: I asked you when you moved to Ipswich.

RM: Yes. Well that's all tied in, because I, I moved to Ipswich after I met my current wife. I grabbed a copy of the Boston Phoenix, which is an alternative people here, on the way to a conference in, I think, L. A. The only time I've ever been in L.A., and I couldn't wait to get out of it. But I was – On the way home I was going skiing in Aspen, so I had all my gear – ski gear as well as other stuff – and I picked up this copy of The Phoenix and leafing through it I ran into the personal columns. She had put an ad in on a bet, because she wouldn't date any of her co-workers at VASA (?), you know the German film, used to make tapes and records? She worked there in the music division. She had put an ad in because her co-workers challenged her to describe what she was like, so she took it seriously. She had 159 replies, which I won out. (LAUGHS)

MEH: Did she call all 159 or did she meet you first?

RM: Oh, no, no, no. She sorted them into five piles. The absolute No-No's, like "Hi, call me." Then the "Nehh" and then the ""Nuh" and then the "Well?" and then there were about ten or a dozen in the top Highly Likely. There were some very interesting people in that. Then there was mine.

MEH: Why was yours separated?

RM: Because of its illustrious content. Well, she had started her ad saying, "Tired of the same old line." Then she described herself. I said, I called and said, "Dear Tired. I have neither old nor new lines. I've been divorced for about twenty-five

[five?] years, so I'm not on the rebound." Then, I described what I was doing, roughly. "You are greatly attracted me and give me a call when I get home from L.A." She did, and it went on from there. So I got to Ipswich because she – She had been recruited to this area by an old, old acquaintance of hers from Paris days. She's German, by the way. Had suffered through the War on the receiving end, unfortunately. Well, her brother-in-law was killed on (by?) a Russian tank. But he was a real Nazi. She hated him. So, she had gotten in her housing – she had rented it first, a little house out on the Neck, way out to sea, so to speak, and we've lived there ever since. Acquainted with that. We had a lease, a rent decontrol situation in our building in Cambridge where I was staying, and it was (INAUDIBLE) sign up at a vastly inflated price or get out. Everything worked out very well (LAUGHS), and that's how I got to Ipswich. I haven't been nearly as active here in the town, because I was commuting by train to Boston. It practically was an eleven to eleven and a half portal-to-portal, when I was working in various Boston operations. I just didn't have the energy to get here. I'd been chairman of the school committee in Weston. I got involved in another – While I was still a senior in Harvard, I was in a group that – We bought twenty-five acres and developed it cooperatively, right next to Cambridge School in Weston. Built modern houses but – In fact I was so busy working on that, that I'd forgotten to register for my last term at Harvard in college. Completely forgot. All of a sudden I started taking courses in the fall and – What courses am I taking? (LAUGHS) They were sympathetic, but I still

had to pay a fine for late registration. Fortunately, I'd had virtually all A records
the term before.

MEH: You must have been quite a commodity during the War years at Black
Mountain, to be a male above eighteen who was in health.

RM: Yes, yes. There were some pretty strange characters (INAUDIBLE).

[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]