

Interviewee: BELA JOHN MARTIN
Participant: DOROTHY MARTIN
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
Location: Canton, CT
Date: April 17, 1997
Media: Videocassette 1, Audiotape 2
Interview no.: 96
Transcription: Ellen Dissanayake, June 21, 2001; corrected by Mary Emma Harris, August 2001. Converted from Word Perfect by MEH, May 2015.

[TRANSCRIBED FROM AUDIOCASSETTE]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. Bela, how did you come to be at Black Mountain College?

BM: Through Bob Wunsch, who was a member of the faculty there at Black Mountain College. He was instrumental in getting both Morton and I to come to the college.

MEH: How did you know Bob Wunsch?

BM: Bob Wunsch was on the faculty at the Louisville Male High School, where Morton and I attended.

MEH: Was that a private school or a public school?

BM: No, it was an all-male school. [BM: Louisville Male High was public.] That's why it was labeled "Louisville Male High School."

MEH: They'd never have that today!

BM: No, not today. No, they've been integrated since then. [LAUGHTER]

MEH: And so you both knew Bob Wunsch through –

BM: Yes.

MEH: And he left?

BM: Yes, Bob left and came down to Black Mountain and was instrumental in us coming down there.

MEH: What did he tell you about the college that interested you?

BM: Oh, I can't really remember exactly now, but Bob Wunsch made a great impression on not only Morton and myself, but just the high school itself. He was something new and very refreshing there, in a creative way – writing and in dramatics, and in publishing a newspaper there, too.

MEH: So, how did you get to Black Mountain?

BM: Well, let's see. I think I got – You mean actually by train or plane or something like that? Well, I think I went down on the train the first time, and after that many times during the off-school periods, Morton and I would hitchhike back and forth together. [LAUGHS]. Yeah.

MEH: So, did you apply to the school? Did you –

BM: Well, I went down there and visited, at Bob's suggestion – this is Bob Wunsch's suggestion. I kind of liked the place. There was just an atmosphere about the place I kind of liked. So, I decided to go there. I could have gone to a couple of other colleges in the East, on a football scholarship, but I decided that maybe football was not the thing here. There was always a chance of permanent injury or something like that, and I had made my mark in the football anyway. So, I wanted to do something else now – get an education.

MEH: Had you finished high school?

BM: Yes, we had both graduated from Male High. Yes.

MEH: So, you went down, and you applied. Did you have any idea of what you wanted to study? Obviously not football at Black Mountain.

BM: No, I was just, just there as a student ready to – open for anything. It seemed like I ended up doing my best work there in the art department, and biology. Mrs. Moellenhoff taught biology, and it was a very enjoyable course because she related the animal biology always with human biology, so it kind of gave you a little better understanding of things.

MEH: You're the first person I can recall that really has remembered her as a teacher. What can you remember about her course? Can you remember what sort of teacher, what she was like as a person?

BM: Oh, yes. She was a very instructive person, and very knowledgeable because she had a medical background of her own before she came to Black Mountain. So everything was very clear that she spoke to us about.

MEH: You took art with Albers?

BM: Yes. With Josef Albers, yes. Real fine teacher, yeah. Real fine person. I remember while we were living back here in Canton, Connecticut I had read in the paper where he had passed away as he was in the Art Department at Yale University. Well, it was one of those things. He was one of my teachers and he was gone.

MEH: What do you remember about the courses that he taught? Anything in particular about how he conducted them, or things you did?

BM: Well, he always tried to make you feel what you were doing, especially in drawing. I was best at drawing. To kind of really feel this, when we were doing

the human figure – we didn't do a whole lot in still lifes. But he was always with this feeling and expressing it on the paper.

[IRRELEVANT INTERRUPTION]

MEH: What about his color. Did you take his color or his Werklehre courses?

BM: I did some of his color work, in paper, colored papers, and mostly in the abstract vein. In fact, I got a little left over from – I did that here. When I painted the rooms in my house, I had some leftover paint, so that was the leftover paint deal. [LAUGHS] That was a little bit of the influence of Mr. Albers.

MEH: Definitely.

BM: Yeah.

MEH: But you did a lot of work in drama too, didn't you?

BM: Yes, I was in a number of plays that Bob Wunsch directed. In fact, he put on a play when he was at Louisville Male High School, too. We did a play called Submarine. I remember it was about a submarine that sunk and crashed because of the water pressure and everything. I don't think the people in Louisville had ever seen anything like that before. [LAUGHTER] But at Black Mountain College, too, Bob did a lot of the drama work and I appeared in a number of plays there with him.

MEH: Do you remember any plays in particular?

BM: Let's see, one was A Doll's House, I think. Doll's House.

MEH: What role did you have in Doll's House?

BM: Oh, I can't remember the name of that character, but I remember also that in there I had to learn three or four bars on the piano. I practiced a lot with that.

John Evarts helped me out with that too and helped me practice those few lines on the piano. That's all the piano I ever played. [LAUGHS]. Well, I used to play the clarinet though. We used to have concerts there in Main Hall, almost every Saturday night, and I played a little bit in that with the clarinet.

MEH: You also worked with Schawinsky. Weren't you Death in The Dance of Death?

BM: Yes, that's right. He did that one play. That's right. Yes. We made a costume for that too. It had a – We made it out of black long underwear, with a white spiral going all around the body with it. We did that over in the gymnasium.

MEH: What can you remember about that production?

BM: Oh, I don't know if I can remember anything specific about it. I guess mostly we put the thing on with almost nothing. Like I say, using black long underwear for a costume. [LAUGHS]. I may still have some pictures around of that somewhere. Did you have some –

MEH: I've seen some pictures. But, you know, there may be pictures that I haven't seen, of it.

BM: I don't know where they are now, but if you needed one or wanted one, I could kind of search around and get it to you.

MEH: What was Schawinsky like?

BM: He was a very energetic man. A very emotional man, too. I mean, he was Italian, I think. He always had – A very exuberant person, you know. But Mr. Albers was too, but in a little more refined way. Of course, Schawinsky [SAYS "Stravinsky"] he was very muscular too, you know, but he was a really very outgoing person, a very emotional person. Is he still around?

MEH: No. He died several years ago. Did you take part in any of his abstract drama performances?

BM: Just that one.

MEH: Just The Dance of Death.

BM: Yeah, Dance of Death. That one.

MEH: You stayed at the college quite a while – for four and a half years?

BM: Yes.

MEH: Did you graduate?

BM: Yes.

MEH: Okay. What did you graduate in?

BM: Art. Let's see, the professor who gave me my graduation exam, he was an assistant at Yale University – No, Harvard, I believe. Let's see, I'm trying to think of his name. Can't remember his name right now. But I have a certificate showing me that. [BM: Graduation Prof. was Marcel Breuer Harvard School of Design & Architecture. Graduates were Bela Martin, Richard Andrews, Alexander Reed, Hope Stephens.]

MEH: What did you have to do to graduate?

BM: I had an oral exam, and I had to write a paper on how I would build a house, including the materials. It was all left up to me how to organize this, how I would build a house. Then he looked at some of my drawings. I got a big bunch of my drawings out and laid them out on the floor, and he looked those over, and decided I was eligible for graduation.

MEH: Were you there for the building program? Were you there when they built the Studies Building?

BM: They had just started that. Yes. I saw it years later. I was in the Navy – as a pilot in the Navy, and I was down in Green Cove Springs, Florida. I got the use of an airplane. I flew up to Asheville-Henderson Airport and came over to the college and saw Bob Wunsch there and a few of the people that I had known over at the Blue Ridge place. Golly, I had a lot of memories from Black Mountain College.

MEH: Right. Well you were there quite a while. Do you remember anything about the work program?

BM: Oh that we did around the college? Yeah, volunteer work. Yes, we got no pay for that or anything. I was in charge of the dirt road that came from way down below at the gate. We had a grader that we put on the back of the truck – there was a hitch. I ran the grader while one of the college people who worked in the kitchen and did general work drove the truck and I graded the road. There was a gentleman who was a farmer, lived down by the gate, too. He was a great guy. I really liked him. He was a great guy. [LAUGHS]

MEH: I'm trying to think. Was that Bass Allen or Ross Penley or –

BM: Allen. I believe it is Mr. Allen.

MEH: Everybody liked him.

BM: Yeah, he was a great guy.

MEH: What was he like?

BM: He was a very calm, easygoing, and pleasant sort of person. Never had anything bad to say about anybody. Easygoing and I know he used to sit in – he would be invited to some of the general meetings that we had in the lobby. He seldom spoke anything but after it was over with he usually, his saying was usually, "Let's quit talking and go to work!" [LAUGHTER] Yes, he showed me how to place dynamite on some of these big rocks that we had to get off the road and how to patch it on there. Nobody got hurt because he did it properly. It was very interesting.

MEH: Was that the only job that you had when you were there?

BM: Yes, let's see. One of the girls and I, I remember, we, we took care of one of the big hogs they had down there. Her name was Hope Stephens. Had you heard of Hope Stephens? Yeah. I remember we went down there, and – because we got him ready for a show, and we had to scrub him up and get him all cleaned up and everything, and put him in this show. I forgot how he made out in the show, but I remember we were the pig groomers. [LAUGHTER]

MEH: Had you had farm experience? Did you grow up on a farm in Louisville?

BM: No. No farm experience whatsoever. What I learned I learned there. Oh, we used to go out and top corn. Oh, yes, I remember I still got a scar on my thumb here where a knife just barely skinned through there and cut it open and had to get one stitch on it to close it. That was my cornfield experience.

MEH: What are really your most – If I weren't asking you questions, what would your most vivid memories of the college be?

BM: Oh – The people there, I guess. A lot of real fine people there, and teachers, too. Like Bob Wunsch, Mr. Rice, and Mrs. Moellenhoff, and I even had a course with Dr. Moellenhoff. He taught Abnormal Psychology, a class in that. I'm trying to think of some of the other faculty there. Can't think of them now, but the whole concept of that thing was kind of a group influence sort of thing. We all had some bearing on each other somehow. We learned something from each other somehow, even in an intellectual way, or a human way. It was real good.

MEH: You went back to Louisville for visits? To your family?

BM: Yes. In between semesters? Yes [AFFIRMATIVE], went back there.

MEH: What about the summers? Did you go back to Louisville in the summers, or did you stay in the Black Mountain area?

BM: No, I went back to Louisville. Yeah. I remember one year I drove a taxicab there all summer. [LAUGHS] That was quite an experience.

MEH: What did your family think about your going to Black Mountain?

BM: They were in accord with me. It was my decision. So, it was okay with them. I still have a sister there. Of course, my parents have since passed away, but I still have a sister there. I had a brother there but he passed away, too, so the only family that's left is my sister, who is four years younger than me, and then myself. I talk to her on the phone once in a while.

MEH: What were the meals like at Black Mountain?

BM: Simple, but very good. Yeah, the kitchen force they had down there were great people, too. [LAUGHS] I remember one morning when – We used to go in to the, actually in the cooking area, and pick up our breakfast there. So I was

going to be real smart one day. I came in there in the morning and I got some juice. The chef – I wish I could remember his name. He was a great guy.

MEH: Jack Lipsey.

BM: Yeah, Jack. That's right. So, he says "Mr. Martin, what are you going to have for breakfast this morning?" and I said "Jack, I think I'll have some scrambled eggs on the half-shell." I took my coffee and went on out in the dining room and gave him a few minutes to make it. I came back out and sure enough he had scrambled the eggs and stuffed them back in the shell. [LAUGHS]. Jack and his wife, Rubye. Yeah, they were real fine people.

MEH: Do you remember the Dreiers?

BM: Yes. Ted Dreier and Bobbie Dreier. Yes. Are they still around, I hope?

MEH: [AFFIRMATIVE]

BM: Yeah, Ted. He was quite a strong man. I think he held the record in running up to the top of the mountain and back down again. Let's see, who else can I think of. Trying to think of some more of the students' names. You have probably been in touch with quite a number of them.

MEH: [AFFIRMATIVE]

BM: Yeah, I had mentioned Hope Stephens and – Let's see, Les Katz, yes, I remember he had a real fine collection of records of, jazz records – Benny Goodman and those people. He used to, he invited me in and we used to listen to them sometimes. Oh and there was a boy, I think he was a roommate of Morton's, who had committed suicide there. Can't think of his name now. But Bob Wunsch and Morton and I were designated as envoys of some kind, I

guess, to go over and meet his mother. She lived in another part of Carolina there. So, we went over there. I didn't know what to expect, you know, from somebody like that, and so I was kind of apprehensive. But his mother made it very easy for us. She just spoke about him, and she was very pleasant with us. We had tea together. That was it.

MEH: That must have been traumatic for the college.

BM: Yes, it was. I remember we got together in a general meeting there too, and Dr. Moellenhoff, being a psychiatrist, spoke to us about this. He mentioned that in his experience, too, that these things never happen suddenly. He said these people think about these things for years, and then all of a sudden one day they do it. I remember he gave an example once of a young lady he knew in Germany who, as a teenager, came down to breakfast with her family in the morning and told the family, she says, "I'm going to kill myself." Of course, they were horrified about this. But she didn't do it. So she went through this routine for years, says, "I'm going to kill myself." So it just got to be passé, you know, I mean they didn't pay any attention to it anymore. Finally when she reached the age of thirty-seven she did kill herself. But this is interesting to come back to this boy who shot himself, too. His mother said his father always kind of had a fascination with guns and I guess this passed on to him somehow. What made him eventually do it, well who knows? But it was done. Let's see, who else can I think of. I've been trying to recall people.

MEH: What do you remember about John Evarts?

BM: John was really a great, friendly guy. He was great at improvising on the piano. We used to have – we'd dance after dinner for about a half-hour every night. Saturday night we'd dance for longer. He always played the piano. But he was a very, very friendly person and always very affectionate with people. Let's see, there was another music teacher there too, Allan Sly, I remember. He was more of a concert pianist. His wife too, she was a concert violinist, and they put on concerts quite often – Saturday night concerts. Is Mr. Rice's son –

MEH: Frank?

BM: Frank. Is he still around? The daughter, what was her name?

MEH: I think she died. I think her name was Mary.

BM: Yeah, I believe so. Yeah. Mr. Rice, always very philosophical, smoking that pipe. [LAUGHS].

MEH: Do you remember any guests who visited the college? You know, people who came to lecture or give concerts?

BM: Oh, yes, I remember Yella Pessl. She was a harpsichordist. Yeah. She came there and played once. Louis Adamic. Yeah, he wrote a book there. He rented a place down in Black Mountain so he could be very private and work on his book. I remember I was asked to go down there once and do some writing for him and help him with his spelling or something like that. I remember his wife – do you recall her name?

MEH: Stella?

BM: Stella Adamic, yeah. She was very much into dance. She wanted me to be another Nijinsky, because I could hop up in the air real good. [LAUGHS] I never made that.

MEH: Well, everybody remembers your role as Death in The Dance of Death. Ted Dreier, Junior, who was a little boy, thought you were wonderful!

BM: [LAUGHS] Let's see, there was a boy in there, I remember, George Hendrickson. Is he still around?

MEH: I don't know. I talked to him a long time ago. But he was working a lot with Schawinsky also, wasn't he? Do you remember someone named Beverly Coleman?

BM: No.

MEH: Did you ever go into the town? Into the village of Black Mountain? Asheville?

BM: Oh, yes. Quite often. Quite often we'd go down there and get a haircut or something like that. Who else can I remember? I'll probably remember a lot after you leave. I was try – When you called me, well all of a sudden I got to thinking about Black Mountain again and people there. I know most of the people that were in the college there were from the New England area somewhere.

MEH: There weren't that many students from the South there.

BM: No, John McGraw. He was a North Carolina – I mean a Black Mountain native. Is he still around, too?

MEH: [NEGATIVE]

BM: I remember he was good at woodwork. He did woodworking down in the basement of that building there.

MEH: Do you remember anyone, someone named Ed Dupuy, who came up from the village to teach woodworking?

BM: Dupuy? I don't recall that name. There was a young lady too, I think she was from Indiana, who used to work with John McGraw, some woodworking there. I can't remember her name. Oh, and Norm Weston, Norm Weston and Nan Weston. She was into dramatics. She was a good actress.

MEH: Did you take any classes in weaving?

BM: In reading?

MEH: Weaving. With Anni Albers.

BM: No, I didn't take any. There was a fellow there who was real good at it, named Don Page. Yes, Don was very good at it. There was another fellow, quite artistic too. Oh what the heck was his name – tall fellow, and very slow, easygoing, very gentle guy.

MEH: Bill Reed?

BM: Bill Reed. Yeah, Bill Reed. Yeah, Bill and Don, they were both very good with that weaving bit.

MEH: What did you do for entertainment at the college? You were pretty isolated.

BM: I played tennis and golf.

MEH: You really played golf at Black Mountain?

BM: Not at Black Mountain. I went in towards Asheville there. There was a golf course there. Go in there once in a while and see – I played with Mrs. Rice a

couple of times and a young lady who was a very good golfer, Peggy Comin, I believe her name was. She was kind of a secretary to the – Thomas Whitney Surette. He did some work there. Yeah, Peggy Coleman was a very good golfer. Once in a while I played with a couple of the guys. But most of all I played tennis, because we had a couple of good play court, tennis courts down the hill.

FEMALE VOICE: He was good at tennis. He has trophies to prove it.

DM: Not at that time. Later. In California. Because Dorothy and I used to play tennis in California, and we have some mixed doubles trophies downstairs, (UNINTEL) out there.

MEH: That's the first time I've heard anyone mention anyone at Black Mountain playing golf. Nell Rice played golf? John Rice's wife?

BM: Yeah. Well, I played with her a couple of times. Yeah. A couple of times, a number of times, I guess. Yeah.

MEH: Do you remember any particular parties at the college? Concerts?

BM: No. Sometimes we used to have little cocktail parties before dinner or something – maybe invite a few people in and have a little cocktail for about a half-hour before lunch or some – dinner, rather.

BM: It was a nice, very informal atmosphere there.

MEH: How did you dress?

BM: Very informally, except on Saturday night we'd put on a coat and tie, and most of the time for dinner even, a coat and tie. But breakfast and lunch, very informal – blue jeans, tennis shoes.

MEH: Did you take any courses with John Rice?

BM: No. Oh, there were a couple other people I remember there, too. French. Jack French, Nat French, and the girl – [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION]

[LAUGHTER AND OVERTALK]

MEH: I find that if you're talking to a quiet person, you think he doesn't remember anything, but then look at all the stuff that starts floating, with patience. There's a lot there.

BM: Well, I was never much of a talker, but I was a good listener. [LAUGHTER]

MEH: Well, you're at the other end of the stick now. Do you remember any – Did you take any courses with Jalowetz? Music?

BM: No, no. To come back to music again, to John Evarts. He usually ran the music appreciation courses there, and I used to go to those. I enjoyed that, and so kind of developed a nice liking for music that way.

WIFE: He's got a little piano over here in the corner.

BM: Well, that's just one of the –

WIFE: I play more than he does. But not often. I forgot it was there!

MEH: Was Dante Fiorillo there when you were there? Dante Fiorillo?

BM: Oh, yes. Yes he was there. Oh, yeah. Dante and I got to be pretty good friends there.

MEH: Tell me what you remember about him.

BM: He was a rather nervous sort of guy. I don't know, he was always on the edge about something. He smoked a pipe and he was kind of private. Oh we did an awful thing once. No, another fellow and I, we did a trick on Dante. In his room.

We got one of the pigs from the farm, hauled it up there and put it in his room when he was – [LAUGHS] when he was out of it. See, I was a pretty mischievous guy. When Dante came into his room, Pshew, the pig went right past him and ran out into the lobby. Of course, we weren't thought of very well about that. But Dante – I did some music copying for him. He used to get music in the mail. He taught me how to do music copying and I copied a lot of scores for him. Of course, I found out later that he'd been accused of plagiarism. So you never know.

MEH: So when you left Black Mountain, after you graduated, what did you do then?

BM: I got a position teaching in a private junior-senior high school in Webster Grove – no, just outside of St. Louis. Mrs. Stix, John Stix's mother, was responsible for me getting there. I don't know. They needed somebody and she thought of me. She had been down visiting at the college, and so she was instrumental in me getting this job there. I was an assistant in the art department, and I did a lot of coaching. It was junior high school kids in football, basketball, and baseball. Luckily I had some very talented kids. We had a very successful season there. We won all the events. [LAUGHTER] So I was there for a year. Then the War came along. So while I was there – I didn't want to be subjected to the draft. I wanted to do something else. I wanted to fly. So I went down to the Navy in St. Louis to the recruiter to want to join up. They says, "Well, you have to have the equivalent of two years of college in order to come into the Navy flying program." So, I says, "Well, I have a certificate from Black Mountain College. I went there four and a half years." They looked at it and said, "No, that's not

good enough. You need two years of college." My headmaster at the school where I was teaching, I told him about it, and he sent me up to a small college just north of St. Louis, and the headmaster there looked over my graduation from Black Mountain and gave me a letter of credit for two years of college.

MEH: That's wonderful. What was the name of the school?

BM: Can't remember.

MEH: A real credit to the school.

BM: Yeah. So, I dashed right down to the recruiting office down there, and they signed me up right away. They said, "Okay." They gave me a physical and everything, and said "Okay, go on home. You'll hear from us." So I spent the summer driving a drycleaning truck around in Louisville, delivering clean clothes. In the fall – Let's see, I was still at home in the fall. That's right, I didn't go back to teaching because I was kind of in limbo there, to go into the Navy. So they called me. The Navy called me just a few days before Pearl Harbor. So, I went into St. Louis – that's where I started flight training. They gave me some uniform there and everything. So I had my first day of dual instruction on Pearl Harbor day. I remember the Marine major who was in charge of all of us there, he woke us up early in the morning. We had to line up out front, and he said "Gentlemen, we are at wahhh." That's the way he said it. So we had to tighten up security around there. We marched around there with rifles over our shoulder, and just like soldiers. So I finished my preliminary flying there. They call that the "elimination school." They call it that, because if you can make it there well you're on your way, but if you didn't, you were eliminated. So, from

there I was sent down to New Orleans. I went to ground school for a couple of weeks down there, and then they sent me over to Pensacola, Florida. I started in flight training and ground school over there. From Pensacola I was sent down to Opa-locka, Florida, for advanced fighter training. I became a fighter pilot in the Navy, and that's where I got my commission as an ensign in the Navy, and I also got my wings. From there they sent me up to Norfolk, Virginia with a group to check out and take off some landings on an aircraft carrier. So, I qualified there, and then from there they sent me out to California, San Francisco. I was there a couple of days and then on board a ship out to Pearl Harbor. Of course, when I got to Pearl Harbor, well, Pearl Harbor was still in quite a mess out there. So I was only there a few days too and they put me on an aircraft carrier and assigned me to a squadron. We went out to the Fiji Islands. We trained out there for about six weeks, every day flying, in gunnery and shooting. From there they sent us up to Guadalcanal. So I was land-based on Guadalcanal, and we flew fighter escort in the Solomon Islands out there. We were out there, let's see, I think about three months. Then they got some new type of fighter planes out there – the S6F Gruman. We checked out in those. They were going to send us out, further out into the Pacific, but somehow they changed their mind and sent us back to the States. So I came back to the States and did flight training in Green Cove Springs, Florida. They made me into a fighter pilot instructor, so I instructed advanced fighter training out there for about a year-and-a-half. Then they assigned me to a squadron and we went up to Brunswick, Maine. Of all times, in the cold wintertime too, for

flight training and gunnery. But then they sent us down to Atlantic City, New Jersey, which was much better weather-wise. From – let's see, from Atlantic City, New Jersey, they sent us out to San Diego, California. They were going to retrain us as night fighters on a carrier. At that time, I had enough points to get out of the Navy, so I got out. That was my military experience. From then on I did various types of flight training and airline flying, production flight tests, corporate flying, and I flew for thirty-five years, as a total. [BM: Martin received the Air Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross.]

MEH: As a pilot? As a trainer?

BM: As a pilot, yeah. I was back flying for an airline during the Vietnam War. They called me back. We were flying military equipment out to Saigon, Da Nang, and Cameron Bay. That was kind of interesting. We'd just fly in there long enough to offload and get out of there and refuel, so we were usually never on the ground more than about two hours. We didn't see too much of action there, but it was always kind of apprehensive going in there and going out, too. So we used to fly for that deal. We flew out of San Francisco. We'd pick up all our equipment there in San Francisco, a planeload, go up to Cold Bay, Alaska and then from Coal Bay Alaska over to Tachikawa, Japan, down to Clark Air Base in the Philippines, and then over to Vietnam. Occasionally, we'd get a trip in to Bangkok, Thailand too, which I enjoyed. That was a nice place to go sightseeing. Then we had another line that we used to fly. We'd come out of San Francisco with the Lockheed Constellations. We'd fly through the mid-Pacific, through Honolulu, Wake, Guam, and Okinawa, and Clark Air Base

and then to Saigon. We used to lay over a couple of days at each one of those points too, because we'd crew change. We'd play golf at some of those places, or tennis. Honolulu was good. You could always get a tennis game there, because they had a big park right down there where we stayed, and we would go over there. You'd carry your tennis racket over there and get a game with somebody. Then after I came back to the States –

MEH: May I ask you a question? Was this military flights, or were these commercial flights carrying –

BM: This was civilian flights, contract, on contract for the military.

MEH: And the other flying you were doing, was that commercial flights?

BM: Yes, yes. We were flying, let's see, in the latter '50s, I think it was around '57, '58, we were flying GIs and dependents out of New York over to Frankfurt, Germany and London, England. I even had one trip to Paris. That was nice. A real fast trip on to the Louvre Museum and up into the Eiffel Tower. Then the airline – they merged with another airline and I lost enough seniority numbers in that merger where I was furloughed. So, I went to work in a production flight test, where we're converting the Convair 340s into Convair 580s, the turboprop airplanes. While I was there, that company I was working for decided to take on a distributorship and sales of an airplane that was being built in England called the Handly Page Jetstream. So, the company sent me over there to be project pilot on that. I went to ground school for a month over there and then got to fly a little bit, too, the airplane. They had shipped over two prototypes of that airplane, and one of them I flew on demonstration flights all the way across the

country and back across Canada, trying to sell it to corporations. While I was in White Plains, New York, on one demonstration flight, I ran into a buddy of mine who I'd flown with in the airline. He was flying a company jet for Heublein, here in Hartford – the people who make booze, cocktails. They're a marketing firm. So he said he needed a pilot and wanted to know if I'd like to come back and work for him. There was no hesitation on that. So that's how we ended up coming from California back here. So, in the meanwhile, while I was flying for Heublein, the chief pilot who hired me had a heart attack and died, fortunately at home – not while he was flying. So, they made me chief pilot and I hired a couple other crew members. Then they finally decided to get rid of the airplane there, so that was my last flying job. That ended in 1976.

DM: Don't forget. You flew for Kentucky Fried Chicken.

BM: Oh, yes. Well, they – Heublein bought out Kentucky Fried Chicken in 1970, and I was already flying with them.

DM: So, I met the Colonel.

MEH: Okay!

DM: So did he.

BM: Yeah, I flew the Colonel around a few times too. He was quite a guy. It was interesting too. It was around the time – I flew him on a promotion trip. I picked him up in Nashville, Tennessee to fly him out to Los Angeles, because he was going to be there at the opening of a new franchise. So we were in Nashville – and this is at a time George Lindsay was running for President. Yeah, he came into the lounge there in Nashville, and he saw the Colonel right away with that

white suit on. So, he came dashing over, you know, to shake hands with – "Colonel, it's so nice to meet you," and everything. He says "I'm George Lindsay. I'm running for President." So, about that time his crew called him and George Lindsay had to go off and run. The Colonel, he came up to me. He just took all this in, he didn't say a word, you know. He said, "Bela, who in the hell was that guy?" I said "That's George Lindsay. He's running for President." "What does a guy want to run for President for?" [LAUGHS] So that was my association with him.

MEH: You said when I talked to you that you had to go to work one day. Do you still work?

BM: Yes. I work seven mornings a week at a golf course.

DM: So early.

BM: Yeah, I get up – I'm on the job at five o'clock in the morning over there.

WIFE: A golf course.

BM: On the golf course, yeah. Yeah, I'm just kind of doing landscaping work, clean up around the clubhouse area. I get to play golf for free, which I enjoy. They have some nice employers over there. They do – very considerate of their employees. There's no pressure on the job. I go at my own pace, organize my own work agenda and priority, and nobody bothers me. There's my check at the end of the week. It's not a big paying job, but it's nice and it's something to do. So that's why when Morton called me back in the evening, he said he was going to call me in the evening, I just assumed he was going to call me a little

earlier. So eight o'clock came along, well, I was already in bed. [LAUGHS]. So I've been working over there for ten years now.

MEH: What do you think – Looking back, what do you think the importance of Black Mountain was?

BM: Well, I think the human values and getting along with people, and away from what I had pictured other college – I did go to University of Southern California. Right after I got out of the Navy I went there. I thought I was going to be an architect. Going through their classes over there was like going through a factory or something, you know. Nobody knew – They didn't care who you were or anything. You just occupied a seat there and that's the way they checked you off too – if the seat was occupied. "That seat's Bela Martin's seat. It must be Bela Martin there." [LAUGHS] But here you had a little more human contact, and relationship with people that you never had in an institution like that. I think that was the biggest thing about the college.

MEH: And when did you and Dorothy meet?

BM: We met in California on the tennis courts.

DM: We lived across from each other. Then we went to play tennis at the same place, and pretty soon here we were.

BM: So we've been married, yeah, forty-six years now.

DM: He's been a good husband! He gets me new hats any time I want. He takes me to lunch. What more could I ask?

MEH: Did you have children?

BM: No.

DM: Because of me. I had an operation just before when we got married, so I couldn't have – But that was all right with him. I haven't – We have so many kids on the street here that I'm the Cookie Lady. When they were little. Now they've grown up and gone. But it was a very good place to live here.

MEH: You could be all the kids' aunt.

BM: Speaking of California, I mean North Carolina too. A couple of years ago I almost had notions of selling out here and moving to North Carolina, mostly because well, it's a lot cheaper living down there. But we've been so entrenched here. When you go to move you've got to think, "Well let's see, I've got to find a new dentist, I've got to find a new doctor, I've got to find a new cleaner, I've got to get acquainted with this and that – The heck with it." But I wrote to the Chamber of Commerce in North Carolina and asked them for some information. I said I live in Connecticut and what information do you have for someone wanting to be relocated in North Carolina – as far as taxes and sales tax and whatever the state has to offer. They sent me a real nice brochure. I still have it out there. I have a Navy buddy I instructed with living down there. It was interesting, too. He was living at Black Mountain and we learned about each other. He moved into another part of North Carolina now.

MEH: Do you remember Roy's? In town, the beer place?

BM: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, we used to go down, I remember the 3.2 beer. Yeah, occasionally on Saturday nights we used to go down there, yeah.
(OVERTALK).

DM: Do you live where he's talking about?

MEH: No, but I've been there.

BM: Yeah, Roy was quite a guy. He was quite a golfer too. We used to drive down to South Carolina to get a bottle of booze [LAUGHS].

MEH: Some of the students had cars?

BM: Yeah. I had one eventually down there. In one summer vacation from school I was working at a country day camp in Miquon, Pennsylvania. A fellow who worked there with me had an old Model A Ford. I bought it from him for twenty-five dollars. Drove it down to Louisville. I imagine – I bet Morton had to ride with me in that, too. Then went down to college with it, and I think that was long about my last year in college. Drove back to Louisville and then sold the thing.

MEH: For twenty-five dollars?

BM: I don't remember what I got for it. [LAUGHS] Oh, there was a philosophy professor there, a young fellow –

MEH: Goldenson?

BM: Yeah. He built – he designed and had a car built. There was a fellow then had a garage, let's see, going towards Asheville. Can't remember the name of that garage, but I remember he had this – it was kind of a teardrop design streamline. When Bob brought it to college, drove it from the garage over to the college, it wouldn't go up the hill – the reason being was that it was a gravity feed from the gas tank to the carburetor, and with the thing going up the hill the gas wouldn't flow upward. So I remember I helped get it up the hill by taking the cap off the gas tank and blowing into the tank and forcing gas up into the

engine. [LAUGHS] Yeah. Gee, what memories you have, huh! Oh yeah. What else?

[IRRELEVANT REMARKS ABOUT WEATHER]

BM: Yeah, Bob Goldman [SIC] was one of the better tennis players there. Jack French played a good game of tennis too. Let's see – There was another person there, I think he was a faculty member. I think he taught some woodworking there, too. We played against him. Can't think of his name. I had a trip while I was with Heublein – I remember now – into Asheville-Henderson Airport. And not having seen Black Mountain or been around there for many many years, my CEO who I flew in there was going into Asheville on some business and was going to be gone a few hours. So I rented a car and drove over to Black Mountain. Just luckily found a road that went up there. So I just walked around the campus up there, and around the buildings, and, of course, it stirred up a lot of nice memories and everything. Back down and back to the airport and back home. That was my last look at Black Mountain.

MEH: You had your own study in Lee Hall?

BM: Yeah. Yeah, we all had our own studies.

MEH: Do you remember how you arranged your study, or decorated it?

BM: I had, I think – for a couch I kind of had a couple of mattresses piled on top of each other with a cover over it, and let's see, yeah, in the last year there I had one of the larger, longer rooms. I had a marquisette curtain that could be drawn across the middle of the place to isolate it off. I don't know why, but it was there. I had a desk that was built by – I think John, John McGraw built

those desks. A very simple desk with three drawers on them and so forth. I guess it had a little bookcase and an art easel. Most of the rooms were decorated that way, I think, except the shorter rooms didn't have that marquisette divider in there. But we did the best we could with all we could find to make it homey. A piece of carpet on the floor. Then at the end of the – school adjourned in the spring – we hauled all our stuff upstairs and stored it up there in the attic. In the fall when school started again, we'd get down there and bring it all down again.

MEH: Do you remember – In fact, I don't know if they did that at Lee Hall. Did you have to haul coal up to Lee Hall for the furnace, or was that just at Lake Eden?

BM: That must have been at Lake Eden. To come back to – any information on Bob Wunsch?

MEH: [NEGATIVE] No one knows where he is or what happened to him.

BM: He was a great guy. I remember one – Let's see, while we were in school down there, in college, Bob drove Morton and I, the three of us, we went to New York City. Bob went to an educational conference there, and he took Morton and I along. I remember we stayed at – Morton and I stayed at the Sloan House YMCA there. So, we just toured all around New York, saw all the sights and everything. In those days, New York was safe. The most you had to worry about was a pickpocket then. [LAUGHS] But on the way back, I remember I think Bob dozed off. He kind of drifted across the road in the other lane and we got smacked by another car. It wasn't too bad. I was on the outside. I remember I had my head on the kind of the door there, and I just happened to look up as

this car came towards us and bumped my head on the side of the door. It wasn't a hard bump, and it was just enough to kind of raise a little goose egg here. But we had to stay there in this town where we were for two or three days while Bob got his car fixed so that we could drive back to North Carolina. I bet Morton remembers that trip, too.

MEH: I bet he does. Have you had any contact with Black Mountain people since you left?

BM: No. Just didn't know where everybody was or anybody.

MEH: Well, just wait. They'll be getting in touch with you.

BM: Let's see. Bovingdon – Derek Bovingdon.

MEH: Yes. He died in the war. Was Roman Maciejcyk there when you were there?

BM: Yes.

MEH: They were both killed in the States in pilot training.

BM: I'll be derved.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

BM: Studies in Creative Writing. He wrote a little thing in there for me.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: Bela, do you have any other memories? Have any other memories floated. This is the Studies– this is Bob Wunsch's own book that he wrote.

BM: Wunsch and Smith. He did that in collaboration with a fellow named Smith.

MEH: A woman. Mary Reed Smith. Studies in Creative Writing. Henry Holt & Company. With a preface written at Black Mountain. You and Morton were very good friends.

BM: Yes. I guess this is the way we got acquainted by coming to Black Mountain.

MEH: Your hitchhiking trips.

BM: Yes.

MEH: Do you have any particular memories of those trips? Was it scary to hitchhike back then?

BM: I remember one trip that we had. Morton's father passed away. So Bob Wunsch loaned us his car to drive to Louisville so that Morton could go to his father's funeral. I went along with him. I remember an incident. It was late at night in Louisville there on one big street. I think it was Broadway. We were driving along down the street just minding our own business and everything. Two cars came in on each side of us and rode along with us. They boxed us in. We'd speed up, they'd speed up. We'd slow down, they'd slow down. They were just having a big game there. We went all the way down to Shawnee Park which is in the west end of town there. They finally just peeled off in the wind. We were able to come back where we were going.

MEH: Do you remember any costume parties at Black Mountain?

BM: No. I don't. There must have been some though. An artistic place like that. No, I can't remember any.

MEH: What about square dancing, country dancing?

BM: Yes. We used to do this – well, we had this dancing every evening after dinner and then on Saturday nights for a longer time. I don't remember any square dancing. We used to do something that Bobbie Dreier did called the Varsovian

or something like that. We used to do some kind of dance. I can't even remember how that went.

DM: You can adjust that light any way you want it.

MEH: That's okay.

BM: I think I'm about to run out.

MEH: That's okay. You're trying to remember something that happened what? Fifty plus years ago. What I find is that you think a person's memories have run out. Then suddenly something floats again. What's going to happen is that tonight suddenly you're going to say, "Oh, I should have told her about this." It's almost your bedtime though, so –

BM: No, I would still be interested if anybody knew anything about Bob Wunsch. I would presume that he is probably passed away by now. With the age differential between us.

MEH: Let me turn this off [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING] You saw Bob Wunsch in California.

BM: Yes, this was after I got out of the service. How in the heck did he know I was there? He managed to locate me somehow. I just saw him for a brief one day.

MEH: What was he doing?

BM: I don't know. I never knew about Bob. Bob would jump in his car and go some place. I remember sometimes when we would go on trips with him. He was always very jovial. We had a lot of fun traveling and laughing and joking and everything. Then for some reason sometimes when we turned around and returned from the destination, he'd become very quiet, very moody. Just never

knew what was in his mind that bothered him. But he loved people. He really did. He loved people and he was a real educator type of person, too. I mean, he really wanted to help people and teach them to learn. He was a great guy, probably one of the most interesting people in my life.

MEH: How is that?

BM: Just his influence and me coming down to the college and working with him in the plays and in the creative writing classes. He was just a great guy.

MEH: Did you go to any of the festivals at Chapel Hill?

BM: Any what?

MEH: Any of the dramatic festivals at Chapel Hill?

BM: I think we won a dramatic contest there once too. A one act play. I can't remember what that play was, but I think we won it. Bob was an excellent director. He just knew how to get you to come out. Bob was always available to listen anytime anybody wanted to talk to him, regardless of who it was. Sit down and talk. Smoke a pipe. Think and talk. He was very good that way.

MEH: What about John Rice? Was he approachable in that way?

BM: Not for me. I think he was for other people. Not so much to me. I mean, we were a little more distant. I don't know what he ever thought of me. I was always kind of in awe of him. He was a very intellectual man. I always remember something that he said in one of those meetings that we used to have, the general meetings. He made a statement and he said, "There is no such thing as freedom of speech because freedom of speech means that I

have the freedom to tell you that you do not have the freedom.” I remember him quoting that.

MEH: Do you remember any of those meetings in particular or issues that were debated or how they were done?

BM: No. We were in a circle. We pulled up chairs or rockers or whatever was in the lobby there and pulled up in a circle. Mr. Rice would maybe start the proceedings. People would feed in anything they thought about and so forth. That’s the way the meetings went. We’d just stay there for a while until we got – never did finish. Always break up somewhere along the road and that was it.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]