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In conversation with Marthe Whitcomb
with Robert Hass, Brenda Hillman, Doug Kerr, & Andrew Leavitt

RH: You mentioned Philip Lamantia?

MW: Oh Philip. You know, Philip and I had our twenty-first birthday at Kenneth and Marie's. At that point Philip was the adopted son, really. Kenneth and Marie were...their separation was definitely off-again, on-again because Kenneth didn't want to be someone who had a broken relationship. He never wanted that. So I started to tell you about joining him in Europe after my first year as a teaching assistant. At that point I discovered, just from conversation and then from a letter that Marie sent me, that Kenneth had been asking her to join him, too. So, whoever comes first or whatever but that led to quite an argument. It was enraging for me—for Marie—and for me too. At this point, Marie and I were becoming friends.

RH: What did you make of it?

MW: What did I make of it? Well, I felt very trapped. I mean here I was. I left my teaching assistant job. I was in Europe and it was open ended. Would I try to take some course work in Paris if we stayed there or... In the meantime I had some funding from a scholarship program in Cincinnati. So that money was being used for us to live on, in addition to the Fulbright. So I felt both responsible and very angry and trapped a little bit. When we were finishing those several months in Europe I really felt that I wanted to be out of the relationship. We came home on a French freighter and I didn't feel too good on the freighter. Then, shortly after I got back, I went to Seattle. Kenneth went to San Francisco. I went to Seattle to be with my friend Ellen and discovered I was pregnant. So, that was the whole other set of confusions and problems. I have to say that during my pregnancy and after, one of my closest friends and helpers was Marie Rexroth.

DK: How old were you?

MW: I was twenty-one, maybe. Almost twenty-one.

DK: Had you finished? You were done at Mills, at that time?

MW: I was done at Mills and I had taught at Cal one year.

DK: For one year. So you were on leave?

MW: Yes, I was on leave from the Philosophy department. Yeah.

DK: When you were pregnant in Seattle...does Kenneth come to see you?

MW: Actually... He might have come up. You know, I think he did. It was not a happy time for me so... (laughing). I remember I have one great weekend. Ellen and I. She was a graduate student at the University of Washington and we were over at the library on campus. I went with her to do something and we got trapped in a sudden but very violent snow storm. So we had a great weekend. There's a great hotel, old-fashioned hotel, downtown and you couldn't get anywhere and we went

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there and we ordered room service and everything. It was great. (laughing) That was my happiest weekend. Although, when I first got to Seattle I got a job. I worked at the city library downtown, because I was planning to try to get out of the relationship and it became harder and harder, I think, the more pregnant I got.

RH: Maybe it would be interesting to know, when you were a senior at Mills, I don't know how you saw *him*, you know, who [Kenneth] was, in his world exactly. Do you have a sense now of what you got from him and he got from you in those days? They say falling in love gets you a new pair of eyes, you know?

MW: Right. I do have some sense of it, in a model that I was very familiar with, which was teacher-student. Kenneth was an incredibly informed person with a unique take on everything. On language and poetry and writing and... I mean he had read, to me it seemed, everything, and he had this sort of violent take on a lot of information, very personally charged. And then against that background, he was incredibly dependent on his publisher, Jim Laughlin, from New Directions. And incredibly dependent on Marie, who supported him. She was a nursing administrator at St. Luke's and incredibly angry at his non-reception in the academic world. So, he had a lot of charged issues that I guess, in a way, I identified with them. And then I thought he was a really great, great poet and I still do. And he had this childhood story that was very moving to me. He obviously adored his mother. When our first daughter was born, her middle name is Delia, which was his mother's name...he lost her very early in his life and lived his life in hotels with his father, who was a traveling salesman. So, I think at a very early, maybe 15, he was very much on his own in Chicago.

RH: That's something you shared.

MW: Yeah, we shared that, actually we did. I didn't ever think of that congruence, but it was quite close in timing that he was on his own and...he got all identified with the Wobblies and I think the club with John...

RH: John Reed Club.

MW: Yeah, exactly.

BH: He was trying to be a pacifist and a Bolshevik—

MW: I know, a Bolshevik.

BH: A very moving combination!

MW: I know, exactly!

BH: I can identify with you because my first husband was nineteen years older and I met him when I was a student. So your story is so poignant and moving to me because you know, how much you identified with Kenneth, but also you can't help but project all those sort of teacher things onto the older person in a relationship...

MW: Yeah. It was so defining. It's like nothing else that I had in my life.

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BH: Yeah... Very wonderful.

MW: I guess the most important other relationship of my life was with Bob Creeley and we were only months apart in age and it was a totally different world.

RH: Kenneth lost his mother to illness but did she have a drinking problem as well?

MW: No. Actually, I think there was some bronchial problem or something. Did she die of pneumonia? I don't know, I can't remember.

RH: Yeah, his phrase for it is "her distraught and something life" in one of the poems. A beautiful phrasing.

MW: He wrote a beautiful poem to his mother. I think it's in *In What Hour* and it was on her birthday and it ends with "today you are younger than your son." So she died, I guess in her early forties or early thirties... I don't know, but Kenneth was in high school when she died and was left in this sort of wandering life with the father.

RH: Did he talk to you about Andrée as well? His first wife?

MW: Oh yeah, a lot.

RH: Was he separated from her before he lost her or she died while they were still together?

MW: Yes, but I guess she was very, in today's lingo, she was an emotionally disturbed person. On the other hand I think she was definitely his equal intellectually. And they had the first decade of their Western life here—they came together. Got their apartment together in San Francisco and then had a very off and on again relationship but it was very intense and Andrée had many crises. Sometimes when she was living with Kenneth and sometimes when she wasn't. He was always called and always involved.

DK: Your first daughter, Mary, she has two middle names, Delia and Andrée?

MW: Mary was named Mary Delia Andrée, right.

RH: So, how psychologically attuned was this young philosophy major with this [man]? Kenneth had lost the first two most important women in his life and he seemed to depend tremendously on women for his emotional security.

MW: The loss of his first wife and his mother. These were deep cuts to Kenneth, but I think the loss of Marie was a very important one, too. They had had years of problems and dissent and Kenneth was sort of a house-husband. And he did all the cooking and house cleaning and Marie taught nursing at St. Luke's. I think it was a very hard marriage for her. Kenneth liked to have people over, things like that, but Marie had to get up at 6:30 in the morning. There was a lot of dissent. She was good friends with Jim Laughlin, who stayed with them whenever he came to San Francisco. But I think Marie had a very hard marriage that she really liked having and wanted to keep. And, she was

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an extremely important person to me and to my two children with Kenneth, very important. We were close. But it wasn't a club against Kenneth in some way, you know, it was funny. I think Marie based her friendship with me partly on her love for the children, especially Mary. She was always saying "Oh, Marthe can't do that, she has to be with the children." (laughing) Things like that...very caring observations. I did need to be with the children. I would go with the kids to Lagunitas and we would stay a few days.

BH: It must have been so Bohemian.

MW: Yeah, I guess so. Although, it felt terribly middle-class. I mean, knowing Marie as well as I did, it was middle-class.

RH: Marie was mother, older sister, aunt, what kind of role was hers?

MW: I think with the children she really had a role of a mother because she didn't have children and I just think that was the role she liked. And they didn't think of her as a second mother, but I think they really liked to spend time with her and when we lived on Eighth Avenue, Kenneth and I and the girls, Marie had to move and she moved right across the street from us. So obviously she wasn't avoiding the geographic closeness.

RH: So then after this explosion in Europe, how did you become un-jealous of Marie? In order to keep the relationship...

MW: Well, I came back to San Francisco and Marie was very kind and thoughtful. And I felt that she had reason on her side in a lot of things that she felt and said about Kenneth. It was...I don't know, it just worked out as a friendship.

AL: She was their godmother, correct?

MW: Oh, yeah she was their godmother.

AL: I remember...it could have been the first time, but if not, then the second time that I ever came out here, when Katharine went to medical school and we came out—the first person she wanted me to meet, other than you, was Marie. I think Katharine really looked up to Marie. I remember she wanted us to go to Lagunitas and to hear her play her music. It was clearly *huge* to Katharine for me to remember. It speaks a lot to how she was held in incredibly high esteem, by Katharine.

MW: It was the first place Katharine ever stayed overnight away from home.

AL: Really? So, coming from the Midwest, I'm going, "This is getting zanier by the minute!"

(everyone laughing)

MW: Yeah and actually she took her role as godmother seriously.

AL: Yes, from what I could tell it was amazing. And I only met her that one time, but I can remember her as if she was right there.

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BH: But I guess my question is, how did you feel the kindness over the possibility that she just wanted to get back in with Kenneth? And then he still had an emotional connection with her obviously.

MW: Oh, I knew Kenneth would never be without that connection. I think it was a really important part of his life, and Marie with Kenneth. Although, you know, she had other relationships. I think she had a great life of her choosing after she left Kenneth but her role in the family was one of *relief* to me. I got relief from it and she observed important things for the children but she also invited them to tea parties and all sorts of things that were, part of their growing up but also gave me a break.

RH: I know how children respond so deeply to any sense of depth in the family, grandparents...

MW: Yeah.

RH: Or aunts or uncles. Anything that's a larger thing; my children have a magical relationship to aunts in Potrero Hill...and would they take a friend to show them their spiritual autobiography?

MW: Yeah.

RH: They would go to those places in exactly the way that Katharine took you to Lagunitas, so...

MW: Yeah, my second husband, Steve Schoen, his oldest son was named Eric, and Eric had quite a relationship with Marie. He would go over to her house and have one of her proper teas. Eric just *lived* for Marie's appearance at my door and he referred to her as The Lady Marie. She was really proper, you know. She wore hats, not across the street, but (laughing) she had her suits made. There was some British thing. Well, she had been born in England and she had that whole sort of upbringing. The reason she lived across the street from us—this is a more filled in statement, which is more truthful—her mother lived across the street. And so her mother had found this apartment for Kenneth and Marie because she had been right on this street and then Marie left, moved out and then when Marie needed to move back she moved in with her mother but by then it was—there were no palpable hard feelings and I don't think it was hard for Marie's mother to have us across the street, although I don't know, I can't speak for her. (laughing)

BH: But you trusted that Marie would never try to horn in romantically again or...

MW: Oh, no.

BH: Or anything like that...

MW: Oh, no. She would chastise him for that.

BH: Oh.

MW: That was not the proper thing to do.

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BH: Oh, I see. I got the feeling that he was still so attached to her.

MW: No. It was all just, that was during the period before the children, but the children were an important event for Marie. And, of course, at that point, most of that period, I would have welcomed a turn of his attention towards something else. (laughing)

RH: Go back to that point where you were pregnant and deciding whether to stay in this relationship or not...but could we just go back a bit to the interesting moment where you had your 21st birthday party?

MW: I did with Philip [Lamantia]. We had it at Marie's and Kenneth's and they did the cake and everything.

RH: And who was there?

MW: Kenneth and Marie and Philip and me.

RH: And so you met Philip through Kenneth or?

MW: Yes. It was so fun about the way I met Philip. I was seeing Kenneth and I was teaching at Berkeley and he said there was a poetry reading out in...what is...there is a district in San Francisco, Amazon something or?

DK: Crocker Amazon.

MW: Oh yeah, it's out there. Anyway, this was a great moment. We went to hear Philip's reading and it was out there and so Kenneth drove the Willys, which was his car, a '34 Willys and we drive and drive. I didn't know anything about this part of San Francisco and we drive and we stop in front of a coffee shop and it has a big window and in the window is this mechanical cow's head and it goes back and forth (laughing), back and forth. And we go in...this is where the reading is and people are gathering. So we're sitting there at the coffee shop table. And Philip, whom I don't think I had met or I might have met him at an anarchist meeting. Philip reads from his first book and Kenneth introduces him and it's a very moving reading. It's the essence of Philip's poetry. And we all ask questions and applaud and then Philip's parents are there—this old Italian father and this very sort of quiet and shy mother and he invites us back to their house. So, we go to their house, they live on Russia Avenue. And so we go, and we go down, there's a game room, it's a basement game room and that's where we gather. And so, and his mother says goodnight and his father comes with us. And he sits with us and listens and has a cigar and then they served us cake and coffee, maybe. I can't remember whether we had wine, but we have cake and his father is sitting there and then his mother comes to the stairs and she says, "You should come up," to her husband and he says "No, mama, not yet. I have yet to digest" (laughing). So, he's sitting there just enjoying it because I figured it was one of the few times he really...he liked Kenneth. I mean after all Kenneth wasn't some young kid so he thought he was a sensible, mature person perhaps...because he hadn't had this opinion of Phillip and his friends and then all these friends from the poetry reading.

RLH: Do you remember who any of the other visiting poets were?

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MW: I don't. I don't. I think Ronny Bladen was there.

RH: The book was called *Erotic Poems*.

DK: Yeah, *Erotic Poems*.

MW: Oh yeah!

(everyone laughing)

MW: And so his father just... I never will forget his enjoyment, you know. His enjoyment of being downstairs with that group, it was palpable. And he and Kenneth were just old buddies—it was great. And then when he went upstairs Kenneth went with him and they said more goodnights in the hallway and then the party went on. It was a very memorable night. I never have forgotten it and then I can't remember whether they turned the cow off and I think they must have turned the cow's head off. (laughing) Anyway, but Philip and I were very close and we had our own friendship and at one point I, during the year, I was teaching at Cal as a teaching assistant, Philip would come and visit, have dinner with me. I lived in... first I lived on Channing Way in Berkeley. Then I moved and shared an apartment with a friend on MacArthur Blvd. And so Philip often came over and we'd have dinner and go to a movie or something.

RH: And what were you teaching?

MW: I was teaching Philosophy, I was teaching Plato...

BH: Oh!

MW: Plato only, yeah. I loved my classes yeah. We had... well I was a teaching assistant for [Jacob Loewenberg], who was the oldest man in the department and he was just... Well, he's no one that I got close to. I think he thought perhaps I wasn't conventional *but* his lectures were famous and all sorts of other people would come to certain lectures that were detailed and known on the calendar. One of his famous lectures was Platonic Harmony and they opened a second hall and had it piped in with the microphone and the hall that he was in was packed because he illustrated Platonic Harmony by bringing all the instruments in the symphony, I should say, in the orchestra. And it was a famous lecture but he was an Old World type of person and, you know, I was all full of logical positivism (laughing) and so it was not a perfect match.

RH: Who else were you drawn to in the Philosophy department?

MW: Well, at Berkeley at that time if you were a Philosophy Major, going for a PhD, you had to have the equivalent of a Masters in another department, which is rather a nice idea if you have the time and the money. So, my second department obviously was English so I took courses with Mark Schorer. I think all my courses were in English because I had many courses in English at Mills but I was doing post-graduate work and so...

RH: And did you meet Spicer and Blaser and...?

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MW: Oh yeah, we had coffee everyday. Yeah, Robin and Jack Spicer and I and Landis Everson. We had coffee everyday that I was at Berkeley at...across the street in whatever that coffee shop was. It was not on campus but...

RH: Blake's?

MW: Not Blake's.

RH: I don't know what it would have been then.

MW: I'm sure it's not there now, but it's right outside the campus and it's on Telegraph and as you're looking, facing at the campus it's the left hand side, right at the corner....and Robert came, Robert Duncan. You know, he and Landis were living in Berkeley at the time.

RH: And what was your take on gay men?

MW: I didn't have a take. I just had many close friends who were gay. In high school I was the editor of the school newspaper my senior year and I think that two of my co-editors were gay. I really don't know it for sure but it just felt...there was a continuum from them to other friends. And Robert Duncan was a very important person to me, very, very close to me. In fact, he almost...well, he became very vocal when I met Bob, and wanted me to be cautious for myself. And Robert was an incredible friend to me and loved, loved, loved the girls, especially Katharine. Robert and Jess [Collins] both drew her. I have to try to find the little books of pictures that told stories.

RH: And you met Jess. Jess would have come later?

MW: Jess is later, but you know when I first knew Robert he was living with Landis and Hilda and David—I don't remember their last names but Hilda was a very close friend of Robert's and was involved in all of his poetry things and sort of did hostessing duties—brought food and things like that and... Robert, and later Jess, were almost a part of David and Hilda's family.

RH: This is a triumvirate of young poets at Berkeley at this time. Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer and Robin Blaser...whose friendship has become legendary and Robert Duncan during this period published the magazine called *Politics*...on the subject of civil rights for homosexuals.

AL: So, this is around when?

DK: 1948.

RH: Robin Blaser ended up in Vancouver.

MW: He lives upstairs from Ellen

AL: Oh! What a small world.

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RH: Spicer was the anti-Beat Beat who drank himself to death by the age of 40 and used to teach classes at a bar in North Beach and who is now...

BH: ...one of the most influential of the poets of that circle.

MW: He and Ellen were really close. Ellen predicted that Spicer's influence would be very real.

BH: His relationship to the unconscious and all of this stuff.

MW: Well, Robert and Spicer have an on-off-again-love-hate—a very old and lasting friendship.

RH: So, when did you meet them or how?

MW: I met them at Berkeley parties because during my last year at Mills, you know, I would go to Berkeley for weekends and stay with Ellen because we were closest friends and Ellen was then not going to Mills but going to Berkeley and so her family lived there and I stayed with them and we would, the family had a ranch outside of Stockton and they went and we stayed in the city. And, in fact, we made the mistake of buying groceries at the place where Ellen thought they had a charge but they had cancelled the charge so all the things we bought for our parties...her father knew precisely...because we were the only ones using the charge that had closed.

(everyone laughing)

MW: It was terrible. They were very nice about it, but anyway... Friends would come, Landis and Spicer and Robert and Robin. We would have gatherings or sometimes we cooked dinner or just Ellen and I would go to a movie. It wasn't always that we were having parties, but I met them in Berkeley in my last year at Mills and then I was living in Berkeley on Channing Way when I was teaching there and so we would meet on campus or at the coffee shop almost everyday.

RH: Was Jack irascible as a person...was he already drinking a lot?

MW: Well, he was difficult, but I thought he was born that way. I didn't know it was special so I didn't notice that as a feature. It was '48—'48 to '49. He was just always...he did have a lot of anger and always sort of a cryptic negative kind of thing, but I didn't feel it was in a drunken haze at all. But I knew that he was in trouble later, at the end of that year, because I think there was a hospitalization and there was a lot of concern among the friends.

BH: Robin...he seems like such a sweet man...

MW: Oh, Robin. Well, he's so beautiful, you have to get over the...especially if you're a woman you have to realize—*Okay, this is beauty.* (laughing) And he is the best cook I know. So, we've made some great dinners in Vancouver.

AL: And she's an amazing cook so coming from her that's...

MW: Robin was wonderful. He is one of these people whose students love them for the rest of their lives and the same is true in Vancouver. Students are ringing his bell all the time—I mean he has a

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full-time job upstairs, meeting people coming to see him. And he's very respected and sought after although I think he had some academic disagreements there, as he did other places. He has a real world in Vancouver now and from all over Canada, you know. And he was arranging readings. That was one of the reason that Bob Creeley went to Vancouver often is that Robin was always arranging readings.

RH: And Robert was a little older than the others wasn't he?

MW: Robert Duncan?

RH: Yeah.

MW: He was...and of course Jess was...well, Landis was very young and Jess Collins was quite a bit younger than Robert.

RH: Robert had already published poems...had you read any of his?

MW: I had read them because of Kenneth.

RH: What did you make of them?

MW: At Kenneth's we had... Early on we started having Friday night poetry readings and Robert...I heard Robert read and then he read at the anarchist circle.

BH: Did you take to his poetry or did you... It was fuller than Kenneth's—his poetry—Duncan's—because he was so much more involved with the mythological.

RH: Romantic.

MW: Yeah, he was a nonstop reader and student and he read for... Oh, Brewster? What was Brewster's last name? Robinson, I think. Brewster was one of the faculty members and Robert was a student reader for his class, but he was also the person who hired Robert at Berkeley and he was very strongly involved in mythology and theology and I think was a very important person to Robert when he was writing at that time.

BH: Because Kenneth was so interested in Boehme and all the mystical aspects of the Christian tradition. How did that line up with your logical positivist instinct? (everyone laughing)

MW: That's a great question! I want to give you total credit because you have given logical positivism a rank it has seldom had in the world of discussion. To me, logical positivism was like—oh my god, I had an A-plus in that. It was very academic and yet it was at the heart and soul of Ms. Meldin, whom I loved, but it was easy to have it drop away. I mean, after all Kenneth...when the two modes of belief are put together... I mean, there was Kenneth and he was a living example. In many ways he had a deeply religious sense himself. No... (laughing)

BH: They didn't collide?

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MW: No, one was a course...

BH: One was a course, the other was a way of life.

(everyone laughing)

RH: In this territory, in a lot of the writing about them and their writing...the Polish historian or philosopher at Berkeley...Kantorowicz?

MW: Kantorowicz. Robert *adored* him, and quoted him at length

DK: He was the medievalist, yes?

MW: Yes.

MW: Robert adored Kantorowicz. I went to several of his lectures with Robert.

RH: What was he like?

MW: Powerful in his movements and he embodied the material in a very... It was a drama. You were attending theater. I think he and Robert were very close friends, or very close academically at least.

RH: Did you get what it was about? Kantorowicz's ideas that...

MW: No, I didn't understand. No, I thought it might have some...it certainly had something to do with Robert and his availability, but Kantorowicz was a hero on campus.

RH: This man was a Polish-Jewish historian, who wrote a book called *The King's Two Bodies*—which transformed the idea of law and European civilization by studying difference between the way the law treated the king as a person's body and the king as symbol's body and my understanding was that this had something to do with Duncan's, with their interest—this group of poets—in the nature of the symbolic. But I think he was also interested in the Cathars.

MW: Yes, he was.

RH: Which was this quasi-Buddhist heretical sect that developed into the middle of Europe, in this period in which homosexuality was, to some extent, honored because they were Gnostics and gay people didn't go around propagating more life. They were thought of as a kind of ascetic.

MW: The ascetical, yeah.

RH: Yeah, so anyway, there was a conjunction of stuff around the medieval, the Romantic—and Symbolist ideas. Was Hannah Arendt also?

MW: Was what?

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RH: Was Hannah Arendt also?

MW: Oh yes, Hannah Arendt, yes. Well I think that she was. She was part of that literature at least that Robert especially was deeply involved in but Hannah Arendt really survived it all in a way, didn't she? I mean, she's gone on to—she went on to continue work that took different turns and...

RH: I think she was at Berkeley lecturing for one or two years there but may have been before...she wasn't there for—

MW: I don't think she was there. Or I would have heard about it, yeah.

RH: Did you want to ask anything about Whitehead and philosophy and Kevin and...?

DK: The famous writing sessions that Robert Duncan did with Jack Spicer? I can't remember where I read the anecdote—they would sit around a table and they would use, say...

BH: An Ouija board?

DK: Something like an Ouija. They were using James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and they were reading through it. I was wondering if you knew anything about these writing sessions they had?

MW: No, no I don't. That's interesting.

DK: That was all a part of mythology at that point.

RH: So, during that year, just to come back to where we started, you're having this very exciting time, you have these friends and you're going over to see Kenneth once or twice a week...

MW: At least, maybe three times a week, and it was a difficult time because you know, I wasn't sure about staying in graduate school and I wasn't sure that Kenneth was in or out of his marriage and then at the early part of that time he got the Fulbright and made plans to go to Europe.

BH: Remember when you told us last time about the bicycles... Was that when you went to join Kenneth?

MW: Yes, yes when...

BH: The bicycle. You had it shipped over there?

MW: Yes.

BH: I'm trying to remember all the details of the bicycle, yeah...

RH: *The Signature of all Things* came out during that year?

MW: It did, yeah.

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RH: Was it a big deal? A party?

MW: Yes, although I think it was a hard time emotionally, you know, for Marie. Yeah, and I think...didn't *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* come out even though it was the early book...but didn't it come out after *The Signature of All Things*?

BH: Yeah.

DK: Yes.

MW: That's what I remember.

DK: And *The Signature of All Things*, if I remember correctly, was difficult to publish. James Laughlin had a hard time getting it to print since there wasn't much movement in Kenneth's career. He felt like his poems weren't moving.

MW: I think you're right.

DK: Then things finally did get published and...

BH: Were you seeing that work at that time? I mean, was he reading the poems to you or...

MW: Yes, in fact, we did a lot of that...we started that when we were seeing each other when I was still at Mills, especially over in Lagunitas. We'd go for weekends and Kenneth would read the poems he was working on.

RH: I just wanted to end this session thinking about, besides Ellen, are there friends, just as markers for your friendships during that period?

MW: Well, Robert was a lifelong friend, and Jess then.

RH: But your girlfriends were? Ellen?

MW: Ellen, Ellen was the significant person. I had a roommate named Mary Ellen Sturgis and she was, I think, someone that Ellen met at Berkeley as a student and she was a very pretty girl from Southern California who had been Landis Everson's high school sweetheart.

(laughing)

MW: She fell in love with Ronny Bladen and it was a deep tragedy for her because you know, Ronny was not available and I was a teaching assistant and I liked my job and I liked my students and was connected to some of them for that whole year and beyond that I was very caught up. You know, I was reading constantly. Kenneth was always bringing me books and I was reading his poetry with him and Ellen was—it was wonderful to have Ellen in that way because she gave me a place to be in Berkeley that I felt very at home with, and also after that I went to Seattle, and before Mary was born. I had school friends but they were—they didn't know about all of this, you know? So, I was

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pretty much apart from the people that I knew through Kenneth and Ellen. I was pretty much on my own.

BH: That's a great... It's a great life and the way your life fits in with all these other great lives, it's a fascinating experience and there's just no other way to get these individual accounts down except by talking.

MW: You know, that's why Ellen is still so important to me.

BH: Yeah.

MW: And I am to her, too, because we know each other so well.

BH: You've known each other for so long.

MW: I'm very close to all her friends in Vancouver and... It meant a lot to me that Bob [Creeley] found that friendship important to him...he and Robin became close.

BH: Did you know you were beautiful and smart then? Were you self-confident? Did you know where you were going?

MW: I felt sure of my self intellectually, but emotionally I felt undetermined, you know. What will happen next? So very important things happened in the relationships I had. They were really life defining.