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**Oral History Project
Interview Transcript**

**Gaby Borel
Interviewed by Linda Arntzenius
March 17, 2010**

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- Linda Arntzenius:* Okay. I'm going to put the machine on and just make sure it's working. We can jump right in, because I did prepare some questions for you. When I was driving up I noticed all the paint brushes in your window. Are you an artist? Do you paint?
- Gaby Borel:* You have to show me. Oh, the paint brushing? Yes. I have been painting.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What have you been painting?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, landscapes, still lifes, you know – everything.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Have you always been a fine artist?
- Gaby Borel:* I haven't done anything recently. I would like to fly away and to be by myself.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Really?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Are you grieving for your husband still?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. Yes. I miss him. You still have one?
- Linda Arntzenius:* No, but not because he's dead; because we are divorced. It's a different kind of grief.
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, I see. So maybe it was a happy event. You look fine, you look beautiful.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Thank you. Well, I hope it won't distress you if we talk about your husband. Will that be too distressing?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, we can talk about my husband.¹ Well, he was a very interesting person. We had a lot of fun. We took fabulous trips. And he loved music. Indian, Carnatic music –
- Linda Arntzenius:* Really!
- Gaby Borel:* He was a jazz man. We have a nice jazz collection and I plan to see the great musician who is at the Institute, you know. I plan to see him because I understand he loves jazz. Did you know that?
- Linda Arntzenius:* I did know that, because I read a little article about him and his love of jazz. But maybe before we talk about your husband and the

¹ Armand Borel (1923-2003), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1952-1954; Professor, 1957-1993; Professor Emeritus, 1993-2003.

Institute, could we go back? Perhaps you could tell me something about yourself. Where you were born, where you grew up.

Gaby Borel: Oh, listen I hate to tell you when I was born. You know I was born a long time ago, in June 1922. So that's quite a while ago for you, right? Lucky you!

Linda Arntzenius: And where were you born – in Switzerland?

Gaby Borel: I was born in Switzerland, yes. I was born in a small village in the Jura [Mountains].

Linda Arntzenius: So were there cowbells and mountains?

Gaby Borel: Yes. The Jura is not too high, but still you can freeze in the winter – yes.

Linda Arntzenius: And tell me about meeting Armand. You're both Swiss – you met in Switzerland?

Gaby Borel: Yes, we are both Swiss, yes. We met in Zurich. I was working at the meteorological institute, and he was preparing his diploma, so that was a long time ago.

Linda Arntzenius: When you were growing up and going to school, what did you imagine your future would be?

Gaby Borel: I didn't imagine anything special, but I was kind of gypsy-like, you know. And I worked in banks, the Credit Suisse later on, and in Zurich, yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Do you remember your first meeting with Armand?

Gaby Borel: Yes. We were eating in the same restaurant. That's where I met him. And I first said to my girlfriend, "You know, I think he looks a bit like a Teddy bear."

Linda Arntzenius: A Teddy bear – okay. I imagine he was very handsome.

Gaby Borel: He was very beautiful. Yes, I can show you some photographs. He was. Black hair –

Gaby Borel: He was supposed to be beautiful.

Linda Arntzenius: What do you mean, he was *supposed* to be beautiful?

Gaby Borel: Because women thought so.

Linda Arntzenius: Right.

- Gaby Borel:* They were not really running after him. He wanted to have some peace. You know for mathematics you need peace, right? Did you know that?
- Linda Arntzenius:* I spoke with Lily Harish-Chandra. There seems to be something about mathematicians. They are very focused on their work.
- Gaby Borel:* Well, except my husband was interested in many, many things. He was interested in art also. He got the most fabulous books on art – contemporary also, you know.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now did he speak to you first or did you speak to him first – can you remember how it came about?
- Gaby Borel:* Well, maybe I did. *[Laughs]*
- Linda Arntzenius:* You're bold.
- Gaby Borel:* And he answered. Yes – yes, yes. And we had interesting discussions. Also at one point I decided to go to England to learn English, and we wrote each other many, many letters.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Do you still have those letters?
- Gaby Borel:* I still have them, yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Did you write in English or did you write in French.
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, no, no, no – we wrote in French. Yes. I still prefer to speak French.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Which year did you marry?
- Gaby Borel:* We married late in '52.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh. So you married the year that he became a Member at the Institute.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. He became a two years Member.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Did you come with him to the Institute then?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. We arrived; we were received at the Dinky station and were met by Mrs. Barnett.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Did she work in the Oppenheimer [administration]?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes, she was working at the Institute, yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Interesting. And this was your first time in the United States?

- Gaby Borel:* Yes. I loved it. We were in the houses they bought from the Army. We were in those shacks.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh my!
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, but I loved it! I decorated my walls with [paintings of] palm trees and all sorts of things. But you know with the heating we had to kick the furnace. It didn't always work properly.
- Linda Arntzenius:* 1952. I'm trying to think who was there then in mathematics. Freeman Dyson was probably there.
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, he was a physicist; I never saw him, though. Never.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Two years. So you knew that you were coming for two years. Did you imagine that you would go back to Switzerland or to Paris or somewhere?
- Gaby Borel:* I didn't imagine anything. I liked the way everything went, you know? We had only one washing machine. Finally we got a dryer. I was fortunate. We were living across from the washing machine, so sometimes there was a lot of competition.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now you were just married, so you didn't have any children yet, but you were in a foreign country. It must've been a little –
- Gaby Borel:* When you are young you adapt yourself to everything. There was only one man to mow the grass, to help people in the project. His name was Victor, and he was Italian. And he was very daring. I remember I had a neighbor who was the wife of a physicist. He had to change a bulb, you know, and he went at 10 o'clock at night while her husband was away! She didn't like that at all. But he invited me to go to Sears and Roebuck in Philadelphia, you know? It didn't exist here. So all the way he was singing love songs, and my hand was hanging out of the window. He annoyed me so much.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, that's terrible! So he had a reputation.
- Gaby Borel:* But, you know, he was very handy. Then I got my first child, you know – that was in '54.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Dominique?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. So I would call him and I would say, "Victor, I have my washing in the machine, could you please take it out and put it on the lines?" We had to hang everything.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And he would do that?

- Gaby Borel:* He would do that. Oh, he was handy.
- Linda Arntzenius:* That's amazing. But only one person for all of the –
- Gaby Borel:* For everything. Mowing the lawn, changing bulbs.
- Linda Arntzenius:* He must've been very busy.
- Gaby Borel:* He was very busy.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now so '52 to '54, so Dominique was born here.
- Gaby Borel:* She was born in '54.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So had you gone from the Institute by that time? Had you gone somewhere else?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. We went to Chicago, yes, and that was fantastic. It was full of jazz, you know. Armand didn't dance, but we went to the big hall when they had dances, and –
- Linda Arntzenius:* So he found time for other than his mathematics – he really found time for pleasures outside of his field.
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, he would go into New York, go to jazz concerts, you know, and he would spend the night there.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Did he play an instrument?
- Gaby Borel:* No. He would have loved to, but. He took some piano lessons at one point. Yes, we had a lot of fun. We went into New York; I went with him too, and we would stay up to 3, 4 o' clock at night and come home. And sometimes we would go into a hotel. You know he didn't get much money, so we would go into very shabby hotels for black people at the time, you know? But he knew quite a few jazzmen, you know.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Do you remember any of their names?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, *mon dieu!* If I had his memory, I would remember.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me, when you first came, I imagine when you were growing up in Switzerland you didn't meet many black people. When you came to this country, even in the '40s and into the '50s, Princeton was still a rather divided town. I know that when Marian Anderson sang, she couldn't stay in the Nassau Inn. Einstein famously invited her, and Einstein also was friends with Paul Robeson. Is that something that you encountered? Did it shock you?

- Gaby Borel:* Absolutely not. You know our first Thanksgiving was with black people who had a house in the Institute woods.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Really.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Do you remember their names or anything about them?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, yes – do I remember them now? Of course. It begins with a B.² *Mon dieu.* There was a daughter – her name was Maddie, I remember.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Maddie?
- Gaby Borel:* Maddie. This was the daughter. And – if I only could remember!
- Linda Arntzenius:* Where was their house?
- Gaby Borel:* Their house was on the right-hand side. If you go into the woods there is a magnificent tree.
- Linda Arntzenius:* There is, still?
- Gaby Borel:* Very beautiful – you cannot miss it.
- Linda Arntzenius:* It's there still?
- Gaby Borel:* It's there still, yes – unless it went down with the storm.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And where is the tree?
- Gaby Borel:* The tree is when you go down it's on the right-hand side. You pass nearly underneath.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So if I go down to the bottom of Olden Lane, to the little circle down there, and take the path into the woods on the right?
- Gaby Borel:* You go straight down into the woods, turn right, and then a bit left. You will see the tree, and on the right of the tree you know there is a little lane on the right. But you can hardly see it, so on the right of that lane was that house. And it was pretty big. No electricity, no gas, nothing. And before that, on the side of the road before the big tree, you had a well. You had a sunken well, and you could still see it nearly ten years ago.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So there was a black family who lived in there.

² Mrs. Borel later remembered the name as Bedford.

- Gaby Borel:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And they had no electricity. They used the well.
- Gaby Borel:* They had many cats. They had oh, about 30, 40 cats.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Do you know what they did for a living?
- Gaby Borel:* Well, no, I don't even know. But I know he himself did, I forgot what, but he became a minister, a priest. And before that, you know there was a lot of snow. He helped me to go home, and he said to me, "You know I was in France. I had a very nice mistress." And he proposed to me.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Ah – he was looking for another mistress.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. *[Laughs]*
- Linda Arntzenius:* You must've been a stunner, because it seems to me you were getting a lot of propositions.
- Gaby Borel:* Well – but you know I'm searching for the name. I remembered it a few weeks ago. It begins with a B.
- Linda Arntzenius:* It begins with a B. Okay. Alright. I would love to find them, because I'm sure maybe they still have relatives in Princeton.
- Gaby Borel:* And they were due to get electricity from the Institute. They never got it. They finally had to move.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So what happened to the house?
- Gaby Borel:* Destroyed – it was destroyed.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Interesting.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. But we had our first Thanksgiving there.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, you went to their home for Thanksgiving dinner.
- Gaby Borel:* We went to their home, and they had radios, you know, that were accelerators in the simple way.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Wind-up?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. Yes, yes. They had a radio, and they were living very well. And that Thanksgiving meal was delicious, except we had had no lunch and we went too early, because we didn't realize – we didn't know anything about Thanksgiving,

- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, it is a big feast. Were there any children that you remember?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, they had the turkey, they had everything. They were very generous. So that was in '52.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So did you notice any segregation or discrimination against black people in Princeton?
- Gaby Borel:* I didn't notice anything because I didn't feel segregation, you know?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Interesting.
- Gaby Borel:* I didn't notice. And also in Switzerland it's a neutral country.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So when you went to Chicago – now you have a little baby girl – did you think that you'd be coming back to the Institute?
- Gaby Borel:* I didn't think anything. I knew I was going back to Switzerland.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Who contacted Armand to offer him a Faculty position at the Institute, do you remember?
- Gaby Borel:* Well, I have the Oppenheimer telephone list in Switzerland. You probably have it too. You can have it.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So was it Oppenheimer³ who called to –
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, he didn't call there. I remember the Oppenheimer girl had a horse she would ride up here. We would shake hands, see each other. She was nice, and a sad thing, she committed suicide, as you know.
- Linda Arntzenius:* That was tragic, yes. But wasn't that later? When was that?
- Gaby Borel:* That was a lot later – yes, yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So when Armand was offered the job to come back here, what did you think about that?
- Gaby Borel:* You know the thing is he had accepted a job in Switzerland, you know, at the E.T.H., and it was a very good one. He was very tempted by the Institute but he felt a bit ashamed to leave Switzerland; he had been there only a year and a half. See?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, so – but he came.

³ J. Robert Oppenheimer, (1904-1967), IAS Director, 1947-1966; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1967.

- Gaby Borel:* But he came when we continued to go to jazz concerts in Philadelphia, and to gospel singing in Trenton. We were the only white people there.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Where did you go, to one of the churches?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes, and to Town Hall also. Yes, to one of the churches – ah, yes, and they were you know singing and kneeling, and kneeling while singing. And I remember there was a lady near me who was wearing glasses. Her husband all of a sudden removed her glasses, and there were always some nurses there, so he called a nurse.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So she was overcome with emotion?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh yes – absolutely. Yes. Oh, it was gorgeous! And they were coming from the South, you know. That was really something.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now did you and Armand join a church?
- Gaby Borel:* No we did not, because Armand was not a believer. He was a believer maybe in jazz. Maybe when these people were singing... No, until it was the end of his life and he was still really – it was not really the end. And he said, “Well, if I choose a religion, I would become a Hindu.” We were going to India quite often, you know.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. You went to Bombay?
- Gaby Borel:* Bombay and the south, and when we went we would visit all the temples – as many temples as possible, because just like me, he was very interested in archeology and sculptures. You know you have so many gods – did you ever go to India?
- Linda Arntzenius:* I was there once, yes, but not Bombay.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. I think it’s marvelous, you know? We went to temples, Belur and Halebid and Somnathphur. And in these days, Somnathphur was not a used temple, because Krishna had broken his flute, you know. But both Armand and myself, we were interested in all the aspects of Indian temples, sculptures as well.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What do you think made him such an extraordinary person?
- Gaby Borel:* Well, of course he was very intelligent. He was interested, deeply interested in every valuable thing. In art, mathematics, –
- Linda Arntzenius:* Well, of course it was difficult for him to think of leaving Switzerland, but do you think he would’ve been tempted to come to the United

States permanently if it would not have been for the Institute? I mean would he have gone to the University of Chicago?

Gaby Borel: I don't know. He would not have – he could not have gone into a business thing – never.

Linda Arntzenius: So what was it about the Institute that sort of clinched the deal?

Gaby Borel: Well, they were interesting people here, and in United States you know he knew quite a few mathematicians.

Linda Arntzenius: When you came here to live as a Faculty family rather than as a Member family, then it must've been different because you were settling. You were thinking of being here for a longer time. You found a home. Where did you live to begin with when you came?

Gaby Borel: First of all, I tell you I was sorry we didn't have more money. Armand came from a very poor family.

Linda Arntzenius: Really.

Gaby Borel: Yes, extremely poor, and I myself from medium. My family was in the military – all of them, you know. So I would never start a letter without drawing the Swiss flag. And during the War my father made me give the Swiss flag to some important soldiers, and I was so proud and so pleased that we were sharing that. You know I had school friends and my father made another school friend, one of my school friends give it.

Linda Arntzenius: So you had to present the Swiss flag to some dignitaries.

Gaby Borel: Yes, I had to hold it, a decent wave, and present it.

Linda Arntzenius: But Armand, what was his family background?

Gaby Borel: Not at all in the military.

Linda Arntzenius: What did his father do?

Gaby Borel: His father was busy with watches.

Linda Arntzenius: Did he make watches, repair watches?

Gaby Borel: No, no. He was repairing them. I never really knew. His mother was from a poor family, yes, and she really fought to bring him up because they got divorced. His father and mother got divorced. That's not my problem.

Linda Arntzenius: So she brought him up singly?

- Gaby Borel:* Yes, really.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Well, he did her proud.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. She did very well. She had a business mind, you know. She worked very hard.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So was it hard to leave Switzerland because of family ties as well?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. More or less. I cannot complain. I really cannot complain; we had a fascinating life. If I had been stuck with a paralyzed man who was thinking only one way, I would have left. Oh yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So were there aspects of living here that were not so pleasant, or was it all very amenable to you?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, it was okay. I enjoyed myself. I think this Princeton is really too conventional. It's not my cup of tea, to tell you the truth.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What in particular did you find about Princeton that you didn't feel comfortable with?
- Gaby Borel:* I had a lot of fun while I was in the project. Yes. Meeting people from a variety of backgrounds; I loved that. Including the black people in the woods. I love this kind of thing. And when we used to go to India I made a lot of friends also among the women who are bringing water to home after they had worked in the professors' places. Yes. I like them.
- Linda Arntzenius:* When you came back in '57, where did you live then?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, they obliged us to build a house, and we had no money, so we lived that one and I never liked it.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Which one – not this house.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* This house. So you've been in this house since '57?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes, more or less – yes. They obliged us to build a house. We did not – and the Institute was giving money with a third off, you know. But there was none at the time for us. So I never liked that house – never. We added a little bit, and that's it. Yes, I like houses to look different.
- Linda Arntzenius:* More modern?
- Gaby Borel:* Not even more modern, but I don't know.

Linda Arntzenius: So you never thought of moving from this house at some point?

Gaby Borel: I thought. We visited some houses, but you know – oh the last one that was offered to me was Einstein's house. Yes, yes. I was the first one who could have gotten it. And we went with Armand. I love old houses – if they are crumbling in a certain way I like that, you know. But Armand said, "You know there is no garage. I don't want it." I said, "But maybe we could squeeze one," but it is probably against the law because it's a house that is a certain age, so you cannot violate, you know the land.

Linda Arntzenius: That's interesting, so that must've been what, in the '60s, sometime in the '60s?

Gaby Borel: No, it was a bit later, I guess.

Linda Arntzenius: Interesting. But you raised your two –

Gaby Borel: It was Allen Rowe who said to me, "Gaby, I think you should go. I think you would like Einstein's house." I would have liked it.

Linda Arntzenius: Do you remember Einstein?⁴

Gaby Borel: Yes, I took a photograph of him. I gave it to the Institute. I took a picture in January '53. Yes. I have to find some of the films. I have the first photograph I took – I have it downstairs. So that you can see it, but it's not in such a good – the one I give to the Institute is better.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, I'd like to see that.

Gaby Borel: Yes. I will show it to you. You know if they would be able to make a decent copy, but they don't seem to be equipped to do that here.

Linda Arntzenius: Well, maybe some time in the future. I wanted to ask you about the social life of the Institute, when you were here as a member and then later on as a Faculty wife. I know that when Oppenheimer was director there were a lot of dances; there were always the teas in the afternoon. Were you involved with the teas?

Gaby Borel: I'll tell you. I went to the tea two days ago – or was it yesterday? Maybe it was. Yes? Yesterday. I think it was yesterday I went. And I like to meet young people, you know? I met a very nice girl from Brazil – Vanessa. Oh, she's so nice! But yesterday I met a man from Sri Lanka. He was nice.

⁴ Albert Einstein (1879-1955), Professor in the Schools of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1933-1946; Emeritus Professor, 1946-1955.

Linda Arntzenius: What have you noticed of the changes that have come about at the Institute over the years?

Gaby Borel: I'll tell you I think that Helen, the wife of the present director, is a fabulous woman. Oh! She really is so active, organizing this, organizing that. I don't know how she can do it. But I know she didn't feel so well about two weeks ago. But she's so brave – she will do, oh, everything to please us. Oh yes. She is a fantastic human being.

Linda Arntzenius: How does she compare with some of the previous director's wives?

Gaby Borel: Well, I think Taffy Griffiths was very nice too, in a different fashion. Very refined; very nice. Yes. She's a great lady. She does a lot for her husband also. They travel all over. They fly to Innsbruck. Mathematics – well, she's a doctor, you know, so she has been working also.

Linda Arntzenius: I know a lot of faculty wives are very much involved in their husbands' careers, and they do a lot to facilitate their husbands' work. Have you ever thought that you would've liked to have had a career of your own? And if so, what would you have chosen? Would you have been an archeologist, or an artist, or?

Gaby Borel: Yes. I should have chosen that before. I studied fine arts, you know. But I would have been interested in geology and archeology. Those both things – nothing else. I read a lot about geology. I think that's a fascinating field. And archeology, well, both Armand and I have been extremely interested. We have been traveling, looking at.

Linda Arntzenius: What did your daughters go into?

Gaby Borel: One is a lawyer. The other one is in theater and at the same time she works with a French architect. They are both in New York, and they love New York. And they are very nice. They visit me in turns every Sunday. That's nice, yes.

Linda Arntzenius: That is very nice, yes. Did you ever think of going back to Europe or Switzerland?

Gaby Borel: Oh yes – yes. In a way, I would love to be back in Switzerland. It's a beautiful country. You know we have the mountains. We jump into a train. I have a little house. I'm five minutes from Lausanne. I jump into a bus – I'm in Lausanne in 20 minutes. I climb – my climbing is not as good, but I can manage - I climb five and a half or maybe ten minutes if the weather is good. I climb, jump into the

train, five minutes, I'm in Lausanne. I jump into another train I'm in Venice in four hours. I go everywhere I want.

I love Switzerland. I feel a bit squeezed by nothing here. Now I would prefer to be in New York – yes. Then on the other hand, the Institute is full of very nice people. Arlen, the secretary; Beatrice is so helpful. I'm going to see her; bring her a bunch of flowers. But right now I am not driving.

Linda Arntzenius: Why?

Gaby Borel: I was stupid. Because I didn't drive after my car accident, and I was entitled to do it.

Linda Arntzenius: When did you have the accident?

Gaby Borel: On the 10th of December '08. And I was stupid – I didn't drive. I could have been driving.

Linda Arntzenius: So are you fearful about getting back in the car and driving again?

Gaby Borel: I would love to drive again, but I think they will not let me.

Linda Arntzenius: Oh, you have to go through a test again?

Gaby Borel: Oh, I went through some tests and there was a man who yelled at me, and I'm going to write to them a note and that's it about that part. On the other hand, I can manage without driving – except we have a new car.

Linda Arntzenius: Oh dear. Alright. Tell me – I want to go back to the Institute again. You've been here – let's see – Oppenheimer was the director when you first came. Then there was Carl Kaysen, and then Marvin Goldberger, and then Phillip Griffiths and Peter – I mean there's been a lot of different administrations. Can you think about each of them and did the changes in administration have any impact on your life?

Gaby Borel: I think the one who had the best impact first was Griffiths.⁵

Linda Arntzenius: Why do you think that? He was a mathematician, so –

Gaby Borel: First he was a top mathematician, but I'm not in mathematics, you know. But they were very nice people, and before Griffiths, who was here?

⁵ Phillip Griffiths (1938-), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1968-1970; Visitor, 1981-1982; IAS Director, 1991-2003; Professor, 2004-2009; Emeritus Professor, 2009- .

- Linda Arntzenius:* Marvin Goldberger.⁶
- Gaby Borel:* They were very nice too. Yes, Mildred Goldberger. She was a very nice woman. And before that?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Carl Kaysen.
- Gaby Borel:* Carl Kaysen –
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh no – Harry Woolf.⁷
- Gaby Borel:* Harry Woolf. I didn't really know Harry Woolf. He was okay, but.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And then before that it was Kaysen. Yes, go ahead – it's okay. It's all confidential.
- Gaby Borel:* It's confidential? Armand didn't have much respect for Harry Woolf. Yes. And then before Harry Woolf?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Carl Kaysen.⁸
- Gaby Borel:* He didn't have too much respect for Carl Kaysen, but I liked them. I liked their daughter. I think their daughter was going into the same school as our daughter – I forgot.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Where did your children go to school?
- Gaby Borel:* They were very nice – we had a picnic together. But my husband didn't think too highly either.
- Linda Arntzenius:* That was a difficult time.
- Gaby Borel:* Then Oppenheimer, he was very – he didn't trust him.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh – he didn't trust Oppenheimer.
- Gaby Borel:* No. No.
- Linda Arntzenius:* In what respect?
- Gaby Borel:* Well, he thought he was double-faced.

⁶ Marvin L. Goldberger (1922-2014), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1970, 1976-1977; IAS Director, 1987-1991.

⁷ Harry Woolf (1923-2003), IAS Director, 1976-1987; Professor-At-Large, 1987-1994; Emeritus Professor, 1994-2003.

⁸ Carl Kaysen (1920-2010), IAS Director, 1966-1976.

Linda Arntzenius: Really?

Gaby Borel: Yes. And also I remember that with people in the project he would favor the physicists, you know? He was controversial.

Linda Arntzenius: But in what way would that show itself – that he favored the physicists?

Gaby Borel: You know – remember at one point he was taken as a Communist?

Linda Arntzenius: Yes.

Gaby Borel: Yes, remember that? And I remember then when the page turned, I saw him in his open car. He was sitting high and waving. I remember that man. I remember a very nice strawberry dessert we had at Oppenheimers.

Linda Arntzenius: Made by Kitty, probably.

Gaby Borel: Yes. He was a very intelligent, cultivated human being. Yes, he was. Very sharp. But you know if you interview a physicist's wife, she will be all for Oppenheimer, and also some people look at the name. Some people say, "Oppenheimer," because one speaks about him, about this and that – some people like important people, yes? I knew Margot Einstein very well, but I didn't cultivate her. I knew her, I saw her, I loved her, we did drawings together – but some people will cultivate Margot Einstein because of the name. I don't like that.

Linda Arntzenius: When you say you did drawings with her, you would – tell me about that.

Gaby Borel: Yes, I went to her place, we draw together, and I liked her spirit.

Linda Arntzenius: So who were your best friends that you made here?

Gaby Borel: Here? One of my best friend is Elly Stein, and the other one, Lily Harish Chandra, yes? And let me see – I'm sure I have some other ones. But I also like the young people who pass by. I think it's refreshing.

Linda Arntzenius: And did you go every year to Louise Morse – to her [party]?

Gaby Borel: Oh yes – I like Louise Morse too. But you know she's at the hospital right now. She's at Merwick. You know that she broke her hip – did you know that? She has a bed that is pretty high in her bedroom. I didn't realize – she phoned me, but I was told that she was going to the bathroom, but she fell from her bed, you know. Oh, she's a dear. Louise Morse is a dear. You know she's so warm-hearted.

We had some correspondence together. I kept all her letters. I kept them. I should have spoken about her, but you know she's a bit remote right now.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. Where did your children go to school?

Gaby Borel: To high school.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. To Princeton High School?

Gaby Borel: Yes, yes.

Linda Arntzenius: And who did they grow up with? Who were their friends when they were growing up here?

Gaby Borel: I think the Dyson's girls are younger, you know? I know them and they're very nice.

Linda Arntzenius: You know George is about the same age as –

Gaby Borel: George is a bit older – older than our girls.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, I think he was born in '53.

Gaby Borel: Yes. He's very nice. We invited him for supper very often while my husband was alive, and while George was passing by. He's very nice young man.

Linda Arntzenius: Why do you think the Institute is still here and still thriving?

Gaby Borel: Well, because it has a good name. There are quite a few people – quite a few famous people who have been here, who fought for the Institute. Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Was there ever a period that you know of when there was so much in-fighting that it seemed as if the Institute wouldn't survive?

Gaby Borel: Oh yes – I know that André Weil⁹ and my husband have been fighting.

Linda Arntzenius: Between each other?

Gaby Borel: No! No – for the Institute.

Linda Arntzenius: So was this over the School of Social Science?

⁹André Weil (1906-1998), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1937; Professor, 1958-1976; Emeritus Professor, 1976-1998.

- Gaby Borel:* They said that the standards were high enough. Yes, I remember that.
- Linda Arntzenius:* When was that? Was that when Phillip Griffiths came in, or was that when Carl Kaysen was – do you remember?
- Gaby Borel:* And you know there have been – what was his name now? There was a man, a worker at the Institute, who was bringing up some pheasants – do you know this story?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Allen Rowe told me about it.
- Gaby Borel:* I think there was even a letter from Weil about that. Yes. Marcus – it was Jack Marcus –
- Linda Arntzenius:* Jack Marcus.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. He was bringing up the pheasants in the heating room. Jack Marcus, yes. And they were very – I mean they were quite dishonest in these days. They would pick up some stuff that was considered “old” and they would put all that into a truck and they would go and sell it.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So that was the staff.
- Gaby Borel:* And I have seen the truck once free.
- Linda Arntzenius:* That was the staff who were doing that.
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, that was Jack Marcus and company.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So that was I think – do you know how that stopped?
- Gaby Borel:* Well, they finally – you know there were discussions about that, and the Institute had someone who made it stop.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So who have been the significant people in your life here?
- Gaby Borel:* In my life? *O mon dieu*, there are so many. I had a lot of fun with the girls who were coming from India, from Japan. We had tea parties, Japanese-style. Oh, yes. I have a lot of photographs, you know, from all that.
- Linda Arntzenius:* I'd love to see some of those. That's fascinating.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes, I will try to –
- Linda Arntzenius:* I would love to especially see some of the multicultural aspects of the membership.

- Gaby Borel:* Oh, yes, yes. I have Japanese parties, Indian parties. Yes, yes. It was wonderful. Wonderful. French parties, if they would come from France or Switzerland, wherever. Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Some people have described the Institute as a kind of academic utopia. And others have said that along with that idea that Faculty come here and they can do whatever they want, that rather than that being a liberating thing it can be a very stressful thing, because they are internally driven. And some Faculty have worked very hard, and not been able to find a balance, perhaps. Is that something that had an impact on Armand – this idea that he had to prove himself? Was he driven?
- Gaby Borel:* When he was very young, in the beginning, he would go back and work until midnight, yes. Yes. And I met some people who would say, “Ah! When I see the lights in Borel’s office I know he’s working.” Yes. He was a very hard worker.
- Linda Arntzenius:* But was it stressful for him, do you think?
- Gaby Borel:* Maybe, but he never complained. And before he died, he never complained about his health, and he must have suffered, because you know from one day to the other he had a checkup. They said, “Something is wrong with your blood.” And after that they said, “You have cancer.” Oh, the doctors in Princeton are disgusting! I will never set a foot – I wrote to the oncologist and I told him what I thought.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So you don’t think Armand got good care.
- Gaby Borel:* Ah! I don’t think so, and I think they are so rude, those doctors. They can be thrown away not even in a wastepaper basket – that’s too good.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So he didn’t have much treatment – he died quite quickly?
- Gaby Borel:* He never complained. You know he never complained. Before, while – I think it’s disgusting. I have a doctor who is very bad. She’s very basic, and I know that also from the husband of a friend who is a doctor. And he said, “Oh, well, she studied with me. She was so stupid and so” –
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh dear! Maybe you should change your doctor.
- Gaby Borel:* I shouldn’t go to the doctor at all.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Well, you seem to be very healthy. You and Armand did a lot of hiking and walking.

- Gaby Borel:* Well, Armand was bicycling until they told him something was wrong with his blood. He was swimming every day. He was doing gymnastics every day. I have to start my gymnastics again. I haven't, and I should.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Do you walk? Do you now go to the Institute?
- Gaby Borel:* I oblige myself to walk to the Institute and come back.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Do you go for lunch to the Institute?
- Gaby Borel:* Sometimes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So how involved are you with the Institute now? What do you do there? What do you go to?
- Gaby Borel:* Sometimes I'm bored. Sometimes to tell you the truth I don't know what I do on the planet. I don't feel like being here any longer. It's a mess here, but I think what shall I do with all my stuff?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Do you have grandchildren yet?
- Gaby Borel:* No, and my daughters are not married.
- Linda Arntzenius:* But they're still young.
- Gaby Borel:* They love what they are doing. You have sisters, brothers?
- Linda Arntzenius:* No. My sister and my brother died recently.
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, I'm so sorry. But she must have been young.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Well, my sister was 65. She was just coming to retire and it was cancer. And my brother only a few weeks ago was also cancer.
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, how sad. How sad.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Thank you. But I think we've covered a lot. I mean we could talk about some of the events at the Institute. The Einstein Centennial – that was a big one in '79. Do you remember that?
- Gaby Borel:* '79, yes. Was it the hundred anniversary of Einstein? Yes. I had a – I don't know where it is - I had an envelope with a stamp on there, and I was sitting near the physicist Res Jost,¹⁰ who was a professor at E.T.H. He died – oh, time flies – maybe 15 years ago, you know. He was sitting near me, and I was having a paper signed by Nobel

¹⁰ Res William Jost (1918-1990), Member in the Schools of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1949-1955, 1957, 1962-1963, 1968.

Prizes to amuse myself. And he said, "Go. Go to so-and-so. I think he will get the Nobel Prize. Make him sign your paper." But I don't even know where I put that paper.

Linda Arntzenius: Now Stephen Hawking was there.

Gaby Borel: Margot Einstein was there. And who was there?

Linda Arntzenius: Stephen Hawking – he's a physicist.

Gaby Borel: Oh, yes. I don't like that man.

Linda Arntzenius: You don't?

Gaby Borel: No.

Linda Arntzenius: What did Armand think of him?

Gaby Borel: Oh, he never spoke about him. I think –

Linda Arntzenius: Why don't you like him?

Gaby Borel: I didn't like him. I thought he was a show-off. That's my personal thinking. That's it. I didn't like him.

Linda Arntzenius: When you were raising your children, were there – what did you hope that they would go on to do.

Gaby Borel: I didn't hope anything special. I let them do whatever. They had little desks in the garden. I let them do whatever they wanted.

Linda Arntzenius: Did they go to any of the like the Christmas party at the –

Gaby Borel: Sure.

Linda Arntzenius: They did all of that.

Gaby Borel: I let them go to all the parties, yes.

Linda Arntzenius: So do you think they had a very free childhood?

Gaby Borel: Yes. Oh yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Do you think that was unusual?

Gaby Borel: No. As I told you, I felt like a gypsy.

Linda Arntzenius: A free spirit.

- Gaby Borel:* Yep, it is the truth. In spite of being raised – my father was very strict. I thought, “Gee, he’s too strict.” He was, you know? My uncles were in the military. Everybody. Always politics.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Was Armand interested in politics at all?
- Gaby Borel:* You know we entered politics very late, the women in Switzerland. Very late. We had no rights.
- Linda Arntzenius:* When did you become citizens of the United States?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, I think earlier than my husband.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, you did?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes, I did. Lily Harish Chandra made me celebrate with three colors of ice cream. Yes. And they asked me if I wanted to change my name. I felt tempted.
- Linda Arntzenius:* You mean – your name Gaby Borel. You were thinking of changing it back to your –
- Gaby Borel:* No, no – I never change it back to that. I don’t like to change things back.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What did you think of changing it to? That’s interesting.
- Gaby Borel:* I was thinking about some change, and then I said to Armand, “You know, I nearly changed my name,” and he said, “Don’t you dare to!” It would have amused me. I guess you are meeting very different people with your interviews.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. I’ve spoken with Phillip Griffiths, for example, and Allen Rowe, and so mostly people who are a little bit removed from the Institute now, so that they feel comfortable speaking about the Institute. And being candid about their opinions of people that they’ve met.
- Gaby Borel:* I think Allen Rowe is very fantastic, very nice. And also one of the ones I like very much are Jim and Jo Barbour.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. I haven’t interviewed them yet.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes, they are friends of mine.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. I would like to speak with him.
- Gaby Borel:* I think you should. You know they have a son who just invented a short time ago a sauce.

- Linda Arntzenius:* A sauce.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. I'll show it to you.
- Linda Arntzenius:* A sauce for eating.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes, for eating; and you know what, one more time gave me a jar that I am ashamed because Jim came here, well dressed, gorgeous, beautiful. What a beautiful man he is! You should invite him to come with the sauce himself. That's what you should do. He will give you some sauce. But when I received it, I was still in my nightgown, you know. I felt sick. I had a stiff neck. Oh, I felt awful. I'm still so ashamed. And he was such a beauty! Yes, really very beautiful.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me, when you heard about the oral history project, was there anything that you felt that you wanted to contribute, that you wanted to say?
- Gaby Borel:* I tell you – in the first project? Yes. I felt to organize dances, suppers, and this and that.
- Linda Arntzenius:* You did that?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes, sure. I invited people for suppers, and I loved to dance. My husband didn't dance, but I used to love it, and I had a dancer – hah! He was so good.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So did you go to the Institute dances? They were every week, or –
- Gaby Borel:* I went to – very sure we didn't go.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Why?
- Gaby Borel:* Because it was background music. It was not real jazz. No, it was not good music.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So where did you dance when you danced? Where did you do that?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, I remember to have danced when the cafeteria was way up, and there was Kitty Oppenheimer dances, dancing.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So the dances took place in the cafeteria on the fourth floor¹¹ in Fuld Hall?

¹¹ The cafeteria was actually on the third floor of Fuld Hall.

- Gaby Borel:* Yes, yes, yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So they would clear the tables away.
- Gaby Borel:* I forgot what they cleared – hardly anything.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So this is in the '50s? '60s?
- Gaby Borel:* Yes, '60 at most, '60s. But Armand didn't dance, so it was noise for him. It was that music, not even jazz, nothing. We used to go, as I told you, to jazz concerts, to blues, to listen to blues. There was a place in Lawrenceville in the wooded section, I forgot, and they had very good jazz there.
- Linda Arntzenius:* So if you did go to –
- Gaby Borel:* Never with Institute people. They were not interested. Maybe we took somebody once.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now if you did go to any of the dances who would you dance with? Would you dance with Members, Visitors?
- Gaby Borel:* Oh, I would have danced with Members, Visitors, anybody, everybody. I forgot.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And were there any mixing of the races at those dances?
- Gaby Borel:* I think in these days there was nobody from the staff.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Nobody from the staff. So it was mostly the Faculty and Members.
- Gaby Borel:* Yes. And I tell you, when the staff and everybody is there, it's too packed. I don't like that. I don't like crowds. Also, I'm hard of hearing, so I don't like crowds at all. And if I go to a gathering I prefer to – I prefer intimate gatherings.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Did you have much to do with people at the University, Princeton University?
- Gaby Borel:* Probably with also, yes. From Rutgers, yes. I remember the Wallachs who are in San Diego now. Yes, and my memory is not that good.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Well, we'll have to look at some of your photographs. Is there anything else that you want to tell me, or is there any question that you thought I might ask you which I haven't asked you?
- Gaby Borel:* It could be. It could be. I was thinking about many things before you came. I don't know if I told you everything.

Linda Arntzenius: Well, I think we covered a lot.

Gaby Borel: We didn't cover that much.

Linda Arntzenius: No? Well, if there's anything you can tell me about that – you know if you want to talk about the directors –

[Phone ringing]

Gaby Borel: Is that your phone?

Linda Arntzenius: No, it's yours.

[Background conversation to end]

[End of Audio]