

Helena Meyer-Knapp
Interviewed by Joli Sandoz
The Evergreen State College oral history project
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FINAL

Sandoz: This is Joli Sandoz, and I am here interviewing Helena Meyer-Knapp. It is April 2, 2022. Helena, one way people often begin is by telling us a little bit about your background and how you ended up at Evergreen.

Meyer-Knapp: Sure. It's definitely a dated story, at least I hope it is. My background is that I grew up in the United Kingdom, a child of a senior British civil servant, but not in scads of wealth or anything like that—just a prosperous guy—and his refugee immigrant wife. My mother was a refugee from Berlin. Her father was a politician visibly opposed to Hitler.

My father comes from a slightly odd family—at least it's odd when one thinks about his history—in the sense that he and another sibling both married war refugees of Jewish ancestry before the war, or early in the war. They were Germans, and they married Germans in World War II. The third sibling—who was much, much younger and married to somebody in the Army—was horrified, but both my father and his sister did it.

I've lived in the middle of a refugee life from as far back as I can remember. I look back on it as very much an enrichment in my experience, and I think an important component in my capacity to be an immigrant that I lived among immigrants as a child.

Sandoz: What was your education like, your formal education, and how did that mesh with the family experience?

Meyer-Knapp: My formal education was very strongly shaped by British tradition. I was sent to highly regarded girls' schools. I absolutely hated the most highly regarded one and left in dismay about how I was never going to go to university. I was done with that kind of thing. Then I went somewhere else at my own request, a boarding school. The details of why that school don't matter, but it was very purposefully chosen.

I arrived so incredibly well educated from my previous school, which I hated, that I, in fact, graduated at the age of 16 with a full array of academic training. Within a few weeks of my 16th birthday, my father died. The next day, I was supposed to take exams for entrance to Oxford. I didn't—I refused to do that—but I did it a week later. And because I didn't care, I did brilliantly.

Long story short, I didn't go to Oxford at 17, but I went to Oxford. While I was at Oxford, I came here on a holiday, end of freshman year vacation. My sister was already here in graduate school at Penn. We traveled around the country, and after visiting the desert Southwest and pueblos and Navajo Reservation and canyons, I was very clear I needed to come back again. I was just absolutely overwhelmed by the combination of New York and the desert Southwest. This was a country that was amazing.

It was also the summer of 1967, and most cities were burning in the summer of 1967. When I came to my Oxford professors and said, "I want to go back to America," they all said—because by then, Nixon was on his way in—"What on earth are you doing?"

I was coming to do Media Studies, which I couldn't have done in England almost anywhere. There was one college I could have done this in in England. I'm very glad I did it indeed. The graduate school I was at—Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania—was a truly interdisciplinary college program. I loathed almost all of it, but I didn't regret doing it, even as I was loathing it. Things like taking tests and raising hands in class. It was so unlike the Oxford tutorial system and felt so infantilizing as a result.

But I already Rob [Knapp], and at the end of my first year in the United States, we agreed to get married. It was really a question of get married or leave because of visas and so on. But I did get married. Spent a year living in San Luis Obispo, California, which at that time was deeply suburban, and—I kid you not—wife-swapping territory.

The University of California systems had nepotism rules, so despite my graduate training and my Oxford degree, I could not get a job of any kind at the university, not even as a janitor. So, I bumped into American sexism for the second time. The University of Pennsylvania was outrageously sexist. Oxford was the opposite because I was a woman, and there were so few women's places, I had to be clever.

You didn't know that perhaps about Oxford, but in my time at Oxford, there were five women's colleges and 35 men's colleges, so it was a guarantee that I was brighter than almost any man I met. Then to arrive at the University of Pennsylvania and be told that, no, women couldn't do PhDs because they might get married— which was what the United States was like in the late '60s—was truly shocking. I was just devastated by the whole thing. And to have it doubled down on me in California was terrible. I'm not going to spell out the details, but they were intense.

Then Rob and I learned about Evergreen. This was midway through my first year there, his second year. He was on a leave replacement position. There were not many jobs for physicists then.

We decided we needed to invite ourselves to Evergreen. We didn't apply to a college. We decided we needed to go and see it.

We both wrote. Put letters in an envelope together. They opened the envelope, looked at his, and threw mine away. When we arrived at our pace, in the fall of 1971, and the college had just opened, they were literally just moving into the Library Building. They had all sorts of interviews set up for Rob, and "Who are you?" to me. It was not encouraging.

I tagged around a bit with him. They found someone in Communications to talk to me about, but I was just a wife as far as the system was concerned. Rob was hired because he always said—and I agree with him—Merv Cadwallader—you know the name presumably?

Sandoz: Yes.

Meyer-Knapp: He came to California to finish interviewing us. We had lots of sun in our living room on the day he came, and he thought Rob was wonderful. But Byron Youtz, who was Rob's main mentor, really knew Rob was wonderful, so he was hired very quickly, and they were hiring physicists by the numbers back then. They had more than one physicist.

I sat there in California "wifed" again and said, "If this is an experimental college, they're going to need people who can help the students get out and find jobs and graduate programs. Maybe when we get there, I'll ask if they have an academic advising program." And they didn't. They had a counseling office, but they had nobody to give advice about that. Because I'd lived a reasonably cosmopolitan life, and I was young, and, as I said the other day, willing to take risks, I said, "I'll do it." The guy who was the head of counseling said to me exactly what people in California had said to me. "You're a very overqualified wife, but I'll take you on as a consultant." So, for not very much money, I created Evergreen's academic advising program.

Sandoz: It must have been a real shock to you. I don't know what you knew about Evergreen then, but I can imagine it was a real shock to you to have a third time of being "wifed" or "womaned." [laughing]

Meyer-Knapp: It was a shock. It wasn't fun. One of the first people I met was Nancy Taylor. She said, "They never noticed that they hadn't hired any women in the planning faculty." It was very clearly established, by the time I arrived, that Evergreen was blind in gender terms.

The next year, they hired Gail Martin as career counselor. I was still doing academic advising. At the end of that year, they decided they were actually going to create a position, which you would have thought I might get, but no.

Sandoz: Who did get it?

Meyer-Knapp: I'm going to say some stuff which is going to be stuff I might want to take out of the recording, but I'm going to say it to you.

Sandoz: Absolutely.

Meyer-Knapp: They hired a woman who was African American who had worked in career counseling or something in some other college. She was so poor at the job that they fired her within a year, even though she was hospitalized and pregnant.

Sandoz: Wow.

Meyer-Knapp: They hired her because she understood something called program development, and the fact that I had been doing program development for two years didn't count. My files were absolutely full of letters of recommendation from faculty. "It's a foregone conclusion you must be giving her the job." And they didn't. I was "wifed" again, I think.

Sandoz: Yeah, that's what I was going to ask. I'm wondering, there were other women at Evergreen at the time on the staff side of the house?

Meyer-Knapp: Yes, although there were women faculty. They hired women faculty in the first group of 50. They hired a number of women. People like Carolyn Dobson, Nancy Taylor, and Nancy Allen. They were all single, and if they were married, their spouses had permanent jobs within a couple of years. The people we're talking about there are Matt Smith, Russ Fox. They wanted Betty Kutter so they hired her husband right then and there as one of the physicists. They hired men spouses and the first female spouse hired was Sandie Nisbet, and it was 1986.

Sandoz: This is asking you to jump forward a little bit. What do you think allowed Sandie Nisbet to be hired? What do you think has made change in the sexism part of this over the years?

Meyer-Knapp: I think the broader feminist movement. I want to emphasize that everybody understood race from the very, very beginning. Its planning faculty was racially mixed. Age varied. There were Native Americans, there were Asians, there were African Americans, there were Latinx. They were called Chicanos in those days. They knew it from the very beginning about race. If you look at the statistics, you'll find that there may not be absolutely perfect. There were people of color on day one.

There were no women on day one. There were no married women, who were married to Evergreen faculty, until 1986. There were very few married women before that. There were some women in partnerships, like yours, because the college turned a blind eye to the sex, gender, other issues that that woman might be carrying. Marilyn Frasca, for example. And she and Sally [last name? 00:14:03] became a pair at Evergreen.

Why did it change? One of the things that made it change was that I began organizing wives—explicitly, purposefully, intentionally gathering us together, getting us to talk. Flora Leisenring, Ann Beug, Sue McNeil, Betty Tabbutt, Susan Finkel—a whole lot of highly talented women. We got nowhere—literally nowhere—but I learned one thing and Fred Tabbutt learned another.

The thing I learned was that in lots of those relationships, the husband could not actually tolerate the equalness of their wife. They really couldn't. Don Finkel had many strengths, but Susan was deeply female his wife. She did in the end get a PhD, but she's never had an extensive professional life. Flora Leisenring, the same. Betty Tabbutt has had an extensive professional life, and Fred was the person who said, "We have to do something about this."

He began saying, "We have to do something about this" early in the '90s. By 1998, they had committed themselves to a serious program for long-term hires in Evening and Weekend Studies. That was partly because so many of us spouses were working in Evening and Weekend Studies.

Sandoz: I remember being told about—and I think you were involved in this—a program—maybe more than one—that was deliberately designed to bring older women students to the college.

Meyer-Knapp: Yes. That was in the mid-'70s. Llyn DeDanaan taught the first version of it. It was terrifically successful. Nancy Taylor was to do the next one. It was to be one quarter of protected space where they were working only with people like them, and then they would span out into the rest of the college.

There were so many people signed up for it the second time that I was asked to join Nancy. That was my first faculty appointment in 1976. I was asked to join Nancy as a co-teacher—quite at the last minute, I will say, but I turned out to be good at it. I actually continued. Nancy was on to something else the next quarter, but I continued halftime with some of them the next quarter. We continued seminarizing for another two years or something after that.

I think it happened one more year after that. I was not at that point interested in it because I was just a brand-new mother at that point, but I think maybe Nancy or somebody else did one more year.

Sandoz: You did the advising for a year or two?

Meyer-Knapp: I did the advising from June of '72 to June of '74. Then I was fired, effectively, which was not very good for my psychology, and I was very profoundly depressed. Then in the fall of '76, I began teaching. I spent some of the year of '75 trying to get pregnant and failing, with lots of miscarriages. It was very difficult. So, to be asked to teach was very helpful, and that's when I got pregnant was when I was teaching because I wasn't focusing on it anymore. Right?

Sandoz: Mm-hm. What told you you were good as a teacher? Let me stop there and ask you that.

Meyer-Knapp: No, go on.

Sandoz: I was going to say, were you good as a teacher in the Evergreen environment? Do you think you would have been good as a teacher in the University of Pennsylvania environment, for example? Is there a difference?

Meyer-Knapp: Oh, yes, I think there's definitely a difference. I can speak to the latter in a second, but I think the thing that made me know I was good was the stuff I mentioned last time; that I have a very powerful natural sense of group process. And usually, my state of mind is so good that I can track the needs of 25 different people and keep them in balance.

In that particular program, I didn't have to choose what we were going to read. Nancy and I knew each other well enough that we could allocate lectures successfully. One of the things I'd done with my two years of involuntary employment was to do a piece of research that was inspired by watching a television program called *Votes for Women*. It was a PBS multi-episode series made in Britain.

It opened with a statement that just blew my mind, and the mind was blown by the statement "In 1832, the British government passed the Great Reform Act extending the franchise for the first time. It was also the first time that women were explicitly banned from voting."

Sandoz: Okay, I get it.

Meyer-Knapp: Because the aristocrats had played a large role in appointing people to parliamentary seats because women could inherit titles in Britain, and they did—not all of them, but they could and did—they were often the appointers. That made me say, okay, I grew up in a country where Shakespeare was a required part of my education, and Shakespeare's women are not passive. Shakespeare's women are active participants with professional lives. I need to find out what happened between 1603 and 1832.

There was very, very little material, and Evergreen had even less of the very, very little material there was. But I found enough to make it clear to me—and this is quite ironic in an era where professional work has moved back home—that what happened to women's professional lives was two things. One was the professionalization of the 17th Century, that Royal Society and the this and the that, that declared women couldn't join these kinds of things.

Also, the removal of work from the house. If you take weaving out of the house, if you take beer-making out of the house, if you take the making of medications out of the house and you factory-ize it, then the house itself becomes a non-place in society.

The death knell was public education. That was when it became possible to say women have nothing but domestic virtues. They have no force in the world at all.

I looked at it and said there was a great plunge in the 17th Century, early 18th Century, and another second very serious plunge in the middle of the 19th Century, of which the Great Reform Act was just an indication. That piece of writing helped me understand how to teach women, because I had such a strong sense of women having been stripped of something they had innately in them. I was willing to do anything I could to help women I was working with rediscover what it was they had innately in them.

Sandoz: I can imagine your own experiences while at the University of Pennsylvania and Evergreen being something you could draw on to be a teacher of women in similar . . .

Meyer-Knapp: Yes. No question.

Sandoz: Were there things in the Evergreen structures and spirit then on campus that drew you to continue to work at Evergreen?

Meyer-Knapp: No, I don't think so. I think it was very much about being place bound. I was a mother. I had three small children. What was I qualified to do? I was not in the least attracted to teaching at Saint Martin's. A bunch of monks. It just wasn't my thing.

Because I'd worked at Evergreen in a staff role, I was very aware of the degree to which Evergreen was a whole education place. This was a time when lots of people took contracts who were members of the staff who were teaching while they were doing the work they were doing. I felt very clear that it was an extraordinarily unusual place. In our generation of faculty couples, Evergreen either drew people together or drove them apart. There were lots and lots of broken marriages in our period because Evergreen was so involving. But I understood the place because I'd worked there for two years.

None of what I did in the counseling office was confined to the number of hours I was actually paid for. Rob went to work, and I went with him. He came home and I came home with him. The counseling office scheduled my student appointments with people for those hours.

Sandoz: I can imagine that what you did, what you heard, your relationships with students as an advisor informed your subsequent teaching.

Meyer-Knapp: I think forever, yes. Absolutely. I will say, though, in addition, that I think one of the reasons that I didn't get the job was that I was too happy among the faculty. There is in many higher education institutions—and I don't happen to believe that Evergreen is really different—a feeling of hierarchy, which is maintained on both sides. The staff are active parts of the maintenance of the hierarchy.

I think it made them uncomfortable that I was such pals with faculty members when most of them weren't. Gail, who was much older than I was, could carry that off, but I was in my twenties. I was a very young woman. When we arrived at Evergreen, I was not quite 24, so this was going on between the ages of 24 and 26. The older white men who were my bosses and the older black man who was my boss were not at ease the way I was in chatting with faculty.

Sandoz: We bring status expectations with us, I think, when we come to Evergreen, and they're maintained in various ways also.

Meyer-Knapp: Mm-hm.

Sandoz: You were an advisor, you taught, you had children. When you were the grievance officer, Helena, were you considered staff or faculty or both?

Meyer-Knapp: It was a faculty position. I was paid a consultant's fee, and it was faculty position. I was faculty, then I had children, and then I became a national leader in the Nuclear Weapons Freeze campaign. I decided that needed to come to an end at the exact same moment that Rita Pougiales said, "We are desperate for an additional faculty member. Will you join the program in the winter?"

Then I taught for two more years, and that was when they finally agreed that they would have something called a "wildcard" faculty job, and one could apply for that. But Barbara Smith, having hired me for two solid years as a visiting faculty member, announced that I wasn't qualified to apply for the position that I had just had. [It] wasn't a wildcard position, it was another one, but they were filling it permanently. I wasn't qualified to apply, so I went off and did a PhD.

That was the second message I got that said I needed more content. It wasn't the first, but it was so rude, and it was so gratuitous, and I have never forgiven her for saying it. Because she never said, "I shouldn't have hired you if you weren't qualified."

Sandoz: Getting your PhD allowed you, I assume, to return to research.

Meyer-Knapp: Mm-hm.

Sandoz: Were you able to draw on that work when you returned to Evergreen?

Meyer-Knapp: I would say it was utterly central to my skills as a grievance officer. It remains very interesting to me the degree to which my faculty colleagues, who had always known my brain and my talents, changed when they knew I had a PhD. I don't what it is that sets them off, but something sets them off. And it wasn't enough to get me a permanent position. The actual conferring of the degree was in January 1990. I was well into adjunct roles by then, and I didn't get the permanent position until 1998. But it did change people's view of who I was.

Sandoz: It's part of the status expectations that we bring with us, I think.

Meyer-Knapp: Yeah.

Sandoz: What did you do your PhD on?

Meyer-Knapp: My PhD began in 1986, so Reagan has become President. The winnable Cold War is part of what he's in. I say, after my years at the Nuclear Weapons Freeze campaign, "There's something deeply wrong about this description of the Cold War as a kind of peace. This is war, and I need to find out more about what war is like, and how people end wars." I figured there were some books about that, and I'd go study it.

I got to the process [and] very early on, even as I was writing my application to do the degree, I bumped into a famous military historian who said, "Siege warfare is the original form of total war." By then, I knew that nuclear war was total war, so the phrase "total war" was very strong.

I built a dissertation around the idea that the Cold War, as it was structured up through 1989, was a modern version of siege war with skirmishes around two sets of interlocking nuclear fortresses. The skirmishes were in Vietnam, they were in Afghanistan, they were in Angola, and there were Trojan horses inside each of the fortresses, and one of the Trojan horses was Berlin and the other Trojan horse was Cuba.

I was even able to say when this siege began, which was not in 1945 or '47, but in 1957, when people were armed with missiles. The thing you think of as Sputnik is actually, to the military, the launching of missiles. That's what they cared about. They didn't care about the satellite one damn. They cared about the fact that there was a missile strong enough to get into outer space, which meant it could get to America.

Sandoz: This may seem like a leap, so fill in the gap if you want to. Thank you for explaining what you were studying and the newness of it. I know that when I was teaching in EWS, you taught frequently about community. I'm interested in, what was the bridge between your interest in war and peacemaking and teaching about community?

Meyer-Knapp: I will tell you. It's not exactly teaching about community. One-third of my dissertation was epistemology, and it was about what it takes for people even to do any thinking if they are engulfed in nuclear war threats day after day.

I came up with three iconic people from the literary world whom I used as examples of how it is you maintain the capacity to think under outrageous conditions. What I saw myself doing as a teacher is enabling people to learn to think about the world they were in, so much so that they would then participate in it. Okay?

Sandoz: Mm-hm.

Meyer-Knapp: They could mobilize their capacity to participate by becoming able to think.

Sandoz: That makes so much sense.

Meyer-Knapp: Doesn't it?

Sandoz: Yeah.

Meyer-Knapp: So, that's what I was doing all of those years when it looked as though all I was doing was making a place or education values and society [are these programs and should they be capitalized? 00:34:29], I kept on teaching people to learn to think about the world they were living in to find out how they could become agents in it.

Sandoz: Was there a particular approach—activities, theory to practice, whatever—that you found particularly enabled by teaching at Evergreen that allowed you to do this?

Meyer-Knapp: Oh, yeah. No question. There are lots of things, but the first thing was, where did I do my dissertation? At Union Institute, where everybody from Maxine onwards was doing PhDs. It was an enormously liberating place at the time that I was there.

I worked with Elizabeth Minnich. She was my thesis supervisor. What more could I want? Right? That was one critical thing. But another critical thing was that it was at Evergreen that I learned that it really was appropriate to work on what's holding people back from thinking, and to see the whole reason why there might be barriers.

I put that in dissertation language in the dissertation, but I could never have done that at Oxford. If you couldn't do the exams, it was just because you weren't good enough. You just weren't good enough. You either had a first-class line or a second-class line or a third-class line or a fourth-class line. If you had a fourth-class line, it was because you were too lazy to be first class. Otherwise, you were a second or a third class.

Nobody at Oxford would ever had said—and they are just beginning now to say—“We erect barriers in this world for people trying to reach their full potential.” It was at Evergreen that that was totally explicit from the very beginning. The world erects barriers. It's our job to take them down—thanks to Joanna Macy. Does that name mean anything to you?

Sandoz: No.

Meyer-Knapp: Joanna Macy is a remarkable political activist with nuclear issues at the center of her work in the '70s and the '80s, and ecology more recently. She specifically started doing work in the late '70s that shaped my work on the nuclear weapons issue as an activist when she said, “Sensations of despair stop you from being active. What you're trying to do is meet the sensations of despair, not run away from them.”

Sandoz: I have heard about her work on despair.

Meyer-Knapp: Joanna is a close friend of ours because Rob met her the week that she first came out with this despair work in public. Rob was in the seminar where she did that. She lives in Berkeley. We've known her for a variety of reasons ever since, but now that we live in Berkeley, we see her very often. But her despair work, combined with Elizabeth's strong focus on how you think made me turn my teaching in that direction, and Evergreen was totally ready for it.

Sandoz: This is going to sound a little trite. Were there specific assignments or readings or approaches that you used to try to remove barriers to thinking, Helena, or was that just pretty much everything you did?

Meyer-Knapp: That was everything I did, but I will say that I think working with Marla [last name? 00:38:41] was really important. I think that came to me partly because I knew Marla and liked her a lot, but I hadn't ever worked closely with her.

She taught me singing, which was great, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. But two of the characters from the literary world that I used in my dissertation were characters in plays. One was Cassandra and the other was a character in a play about the Holocaust. I've always learned myself a lot about the nature of the world from theater. It went on as recently as last night.

I went to New Haven partly to see the workshop production of a play that my cousin is the director. It's a single-man show by a guy who's a MacArthur Genius award person, but he came out of prison as a young man, having been incarcerated for nine years and has built his life since then. The play is called *Felon*. Even last night listening to that play, I finally worked out how to write the next piece of work I need to do on Ukraine because of the way they structured the particular performance, that my cousin and this guy structured.

There's some way in which theater is very mystical to me. Sometimes I go as far as to say, "The Brits never did religion very seriously when I was alive, but they always did Shakespeare very seriously." I know Shakespeare is full of astonishing archetypes. They're called characters but they're archetypes of really valuable kinds, so I think that's probably where that came from in the depth of my learning, but I didn't have any question that when Marla and I were going to get together to teach, we were going to teach *Making Your Place Through Theater*, because I didn't want the students ever to do a skit. Not ever. They were going to use properly thought-out lines.

The year that you joined us and took it through to the end, that was a radical break for us to get the students to do any writing of any kind of scripts themselves. I've always known that I wanted

students to enter the life of other people deeply, fully embodied, and Marla was willing to do fully embodied. We weren't just going to sit around the table and read.

Sandoz: I vividly remember playing a drunk older man in one of the plays when I taught with Marla, which gave me a completely different perspective on that character.

Meyer-Knapp: Yeah.

Sandoz: How did being the grievance officer mesh? Did I catch that right? You were the grievance officer while you were going through your PhD program or just after?

Meyer-Knapp: After.

Sandoz: I'm curious about how that work gave you perhaps a different view on Evergreen, but also was work toward removing barriers to thinking and learning.

Meyer-Knapp: It was very interesting. When I first arrived at the college and was assigned to what was called the counseling office, people used to come to me with difficult students and I used to say, "What I really do is academic advising, but I'd be happy to talk to them about what they're trying to do."

So, I'd already been involved to some extent with students who weren't running smoothly. But the job had always been a faculty job because Richard Jones—founding psychologist—said, "If students make ethics mistakes, this is a teaching-and-learning situation. It's not a punishment situation."

Joe Tougas was the last of the faculty to have the job. One of the things I fought Art Costantino for most severely—after I fought him from allowing them to name a building after him—is I fought him for changing that into a staff job. It should be teaching and learning most centrally, particularly for kids who've all grown up in a society which says it has "zero tolerance" for school infractions.

You've got to learn ethics. It's not something you know automatically. It's not something your family teaches you automatically. It's something you have to learn. The number of people I've got in front of me who were, in some fundamental sense, ignorant is just remarkable, so I saw it always as a teaching-and-learning situation, with a few exceptions where the danger involved was so severe that—that wasn't what I was doing. I was doing something else. I was keeping people safe. But for the rest, it was always just teaching and learning.

I had to hold the cops at bay because they wanted to punish and fine, and I kept on saying, "No, you don't understand. Fines are not fair punishments in a society where there are radical differences in wealth." And at Evergreen they were dadada. We went through that time after time after time after time.

What I discovered was that I returned frequently to what I was learning from Rob's life—he was increasingly spending time thinking about Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism in particular—that I was

repeatedly dealing with people who were suffering from at least one, if not more than one, of what the Tibetans call the three poisons, which are greed, anger and delusion. The most common was delusion. That they were in some sense completely out of touch with the world they were in. It might be they were out of touch with the world they were in by growing pot on their windowsills in the dorms, or it might be that they were out of touch with the world that they were in because they thought they could dominate seminar. One of the violations of the student conduct code is disrupting college classes. I got a certain number of cases of that kind.

I always thought about my job as fundamentally trying to help people find their way back to a peaceable world. It wasn't always easy, and the most difficult thing actually, apart from the general level of delusion, was how many girls in particular just wanted to wish it not to have happened, and they just found it so difficult to want to learn from the fact that it had happened.

Sandoz: There's all kinds of learning at Evergreen. You mentioned more of a holistic view, and I can see how taking the approach you did as a grievance officer creates more learning opportunities.

Meyer-Knapp: Yeah. I also learned myself then, though, because I discovered all the ways in which because Evergreen is a public institution, it's bound by the US Constitution in what it does. The Fourteenth Amendment applies at Evergreen. You cannot arbitrarily deprive people of their education. They have a liberty interest in doing it. I loved that. I absolutely loved it that because we were a state institution, we had to not strip people of their rights.

Sandoz: That is a wonderful thing to keep in mind.

Meyer-Knapp: It was marvelous. I never knew it, but then this lawyer, who was my advisor as the campus grievance officer, said, "This is what we have to do for the Fourteenth Amendment." I said, "What?" All we had to do was send certified letters so we would know whether or not they got the letters.

Sandoz: The social contract has a statement at the beginning, or somewhere in it, that says, "Because we are a state institution . . ." Was that something you were involved with?

Meyer-Knapp: I was involved with the student conduct code, not the social contract. The student conduct code had to be written and rewritten more than once. There were issues about, for example, whether or not to use the word "rape" in relationship difficulties.

I went once to a national conference about this, and I ended up coming back from it blissfully happy that we had no football teams, because they were so dangerous to the social structure of an institution in so many different ways. I noticed that when we got ourselves AIAI—whatever they were—

competitions, we some of those things began to reverberate at Evergreen, too, but in a much lesser way than they would have done if it had been a football team.

The main thing I realized as a result of this was that Evergreen people of all kinds deeply believed in learning. Most of the people that were doing student conduct work in other colleges were imposing punishments. I provided people with things they had to do, as did Joe, as did Sue Feldman, as did my predecessors. I was brought into it originally because the people doing it had got very caught up in a particular case where whether or not it was described as a rape really mattered, and the people holding the job no longer had the credibility to hold it.

I ended up feeling that what I was dealing with almost all the time was domestic violence. Not rape, but domestic violence. These were people who were in that kind of a relationship, and it had become violent, and inappropriately, privately, domestically violent. That was never used. Students would have been pissed as hell if I'd used those terms. "What do you mean, domestic violence? That's what adults do," or, "That's what people that don't live in dorms do." But it actually was domestic violence.

Sandoz: I can see that being a grievance officer would give you a view of campus life, and also the people involved in the campus community, as very, very different than being a classroom teacher. I know that after you were the grievance officer—we're up to the time now when Part-time Studies and EWS was starting to become a thing at Evergreen—you did another one of your many transitions. This one, I think, back into or continuing into the classroom, and I know that you have recently defined yourself as a founding faculty for EWS.

Meyer-Knapp: I decided to do that, yes.

Sandoz: I wondered what you'd like to say about EWS, about either the founding of it or the value of it. The floor is yours.

Meyer-Knapp: When Evergreen first started, there were all kinds of limitations in the permanent faculty—almost all male—about what one could do. Those limitations worked pretty well for people who were 18 and wealthy enough to go through college four years straight, but they didn't work very well with a lot of the realities.

It turned out that one of the things that was missing from the basic Evergreen design was the thing that other colleges called the "service class"—the math that you need to do physics, the French you need to do any foreign languages. So, EWS began as a series of classes taught by people who didn't have regular faculty positions to teach intro to this and intro to that.

When Theresa Aragon and Steve Blakeslee and I began teaching programs, that was because Pris Bowerman, who at that time was the dean, said, “These people who come at night to classes would like to have some coordinated studies classes, too.”

By then, Tacoma had pioneered the idea of the autobiography as a basic class for anybody going to college. Steve took that job on and taught autobiography year after year for quite a long time. And quite a lot of people wanted generic business. “Why don’t you do nighttime business classes?” So, Theresa did that, and I did general social studies-types of stuff, because people wanted evening/weekend integrated programs. They wanted to be able to do eight credits in a coordinated kind of way.

We did that for quite a few years, starting in the late ‘80s. Slowly but surely, people began to say, “We should have more of that, shouldn’t we? There’s a lot of demand for that, isn’t there?”

Along comes Sarah Ryan to teach Labor Studies. I can’t even remember exactly what the sequence was, but then along comes Fred Tabbutt. Fred Tabbutt says, “We’ve got to stop having this exploited corner of Evergreen. We’ve got to have a proper curriculum there. We’ve got to have proper faculty there. We’ve got to take it seriously.” Fred was such a mild-mannered, thoughtful, careful guy that people actually listened to him.

The first thing they did was to hire two people on two-year contracts, John McCann and Susan Preciso. Why didn’t I apply for one of those? First of all, because I was pissed—by then, I had been doing this for nine years, adjuncting—but I’d just gotten a Bunting Fellowship. I didn’t need it. I really didn’t need it. I was going off to do another year of my *War-and-Peace*-related work. I was going to really write about peacemaking. Because what I’d done in my dissertation was the Cold War, but this was peacemaking, and I was going to do it. It was five years after my dissertation, and I was just so ready for that, so I never applied for that.

I came back for the academic year of ‘95-’96, and that was when I knew I was going to team teach from then on. Marla was going to be it and John and Susan had modeled that, and Marla was going to be the first, and I was going to do it again and again, and I was damned if I was running for [unintelligible 00:56:25] anymore.

Within a couple years of that, the regular faculty, spurred on partly by Fred, had made some permanent positions for Evening and Weekend Studies, and I applied for one of them. But I think the real thing that happened was that Pris Bowerman listened to Steve and Theresa and to me and made programs happen against no background. But we said—and she agreed—that there needed to be eight credit programs. I don’t know what Steve would say about how he got involved in it, but I do feel that

that was the absolute turning point. There were other people doing courses that weren't just service courses as well, but that moment turned into John and Susan having a two-year appointment.

Sandoz: I came in 1995 to EWS and what I remember is that you called us together in a little, tiny room on the third floor of the library where our offices were at that time and said, "What are we going to teach next year?" We came up with a semi-balanced—within our capabilities, our backgrounds—set of team-taught programs. I wanted to teach about the Columbia River but somebody else got to teach in that area, so I taught something else.

I also remember that you taught me how to look at the good of the institution and the good of the students as a faculty rather than my good. I remember you telling me if my program was under enrolled, then it was my responsibility to take some contracts to do what I could, because if I didn't, somebody else on the faculty would need to do that. That kind of collaboration, even outside of team teaching, has become, for me, a defining characteristic of being a faculty member at Evergreen.

I know Rob taught at Evergreen and you were at Evergreen in various capacities. What have you seen as most successful in orienting faculty who may have been trained somewhere else? Everybody probably got their graduate degree somewhere else, many of us. What helps people imbibe the positive parts of learning to be an Evergreen faculty? Have you observed specific things?

Meyer-Knapp: Years ago, probably around the time I was doing my dissertation, an ex-Evergreen student of mine—a student who had lived with us for several years—gave me a t-shirt. The teacher said on the front "Fear." On the back it said "Less."

If I had to do one thing at Evergreen with new people, I would say, "Be less frightened." Probably you were able to hear me because you weren't full of fear. You were plenty ready to criticize, but you had done lots of competitive sports. You were a strong, strategically oriented person. I think an enormous number of people show up at Evergreen ready to let any fear [unintelligible 01:00:43] get triggered that they have.

I don't know anybody at Evergreen who is actually being denied a continuing contract. I don't know anybody. I know that Rob had to intervene in the direct rescue of a fulltime faculty member who was close to being denied, but Rob and other people intervened to teach this person how to be a better Evergreen faculty member. That person got better.

There have been people who were fired at Evergreen for one reason or another, particularly in the old days, but I don't know anybody who has been denied who had a continuing contract. The amount of anxiety people carry into Evergreen about tenure is absurd. Nobody tries to stop it. Nobody.

Nobody tries to say, “The basic structural system at Evergreen is you are hired into a position which is yours to lose. You are not competing with anybody for an independent, tenured slot.”

It's just a structural question. Most places, you're applying for tenure, and there are seven tenured spaces, and there are 15 applicants. That's not true at Evergreen, and nobody tries to explain that to people.

But underneath that, I would say, there's a much higher capacity to be alarmist about one's own personal security at Evergreen. There are plenty of people who have deeply been pained and suffered at Evergreen. Don't get me wrong. But people show up with that. They walk in the door with that.

If I was trying to teach new faculty about how to teach well, I would say, “These are the structural benefits on which your place rests. You don't have to compete for a salary increase, you don't have to compete for a tenured slot, and you don't have to compete for the right to teach a class that students want. You will have to compete to write [unintelligible 01:03:08] students aren't interested in. But if you pay attention to what students want to learn, you will not be at risk.” Those are the three things I would teach.

Sandoz: That reminds me of Patrick Hill's eight transitions that students go through when they come to Evergreen, and you're putting it on a faculty level.

Meyer-Knapp: Yeah.

Sandoz: I wonder if some of the fear absolutely is around tenure and continuity. I know that. I wonder if some of it is also just that we can teach what we want to teach. There aren't the structures that carry one through to success if one follows them.

Meyer-Knapp: Yes, I think there's no question that it's like having your own private relationship with God. If you're failing, you're screwed. [laughter] Because it's you that set it up. If you're sinning, you're screwed if you're a Protestant, a Presbyterian.

Sandoz: Yeah, who are you going to blame?

Meyer-Knapp: But I think also I will say that the thing you were hearing in what I said at those times was that it is true that growing up in the United Kingdom, you grow up with a much stronger sense that the place you are in has things it asks of you, and you should be trying to pay attention to them. That's harder to believe here is the rattle of individualism. It is true, even in America, that the rattle of individualism is so loud that it's harder to hear it.

Sandoz: As you know, I just taught about the common good, and I would agree with you.

Meyer-Knapp: Yeah.

Sandoz: Helena, we've been talking for over an hour. I'd like to end with one more question, if you're up for that.

Meyer-Knapp: Sure.

Sandoz: Then we can talk about whether you have more that you'd like to say in the second session. You've mentioned going back and getting a PhD, but I'm curious how your work at Evergreen over time in various capacities has shaped your own intellectual inquiries and life.

Meyer-Knapp: The woman who studied history at Oxford would never have been able to do the PhD I did. She just didn't have the interdisciplinary reach or richness in her background. Just being around Evergreen for 15 years, listening to people talk over dinner, or listening to faculty in seminars, or hearing what people who are lecturing on—all sorts of things—really opened my doors.

So, when I produced a dissertation—which, by the way, at Union was able to get the prize for the best dissertation of the year because I had taught at Evergreen. Because I was able to write a dissertation that simultaneously was rigorous in its description of military strategy, detailed in its description of recent history, and very alive to the epistemological and literary resources that might help one understand what I had just written.

I couldn't have done that from Oxford. I could have written the modern history part, I could have written the military strategy part, but I couldn't have written them together, and I could certainly not have written the stuff about the literary voices who helped me learn to think.

I don't think I could have developed the commitment to that framework I was putting on my teaching after the PhD, when I was teaching with Marla; that framework that said I'm teaching people to learn to be able to think to put themselves into the world outside the college. That's theory to practice without that language, but I don't think I could have developed the political passion for it without Evergreen.

Because there's no question that it was political passion. It was about power and about shifting power in the country. I wasn't trying to politicize the students. I was trying to create a political system that could enable students to find out how they fit, and work with it.

Sandoz: The question I was going to ask is, was it more than factual knowledge that changed for it? It sounds like it was in several ways. It was intellectual habits.

Meyer-Knapp: Very much so. It's very hard, I think, for people at Evergreen who are not gone from Olympia as much as I am to realize how highly regarded Evergreen is. But I don't think there's any question that the Bunting noticed that I came from Evergreen. They've had other people from places in

Washington State, I'm sure, but I'm not the first person to come to the Bunting from Evergreen, I'm the second.

There was a feminist historian called Susie Strasser who actually didn't come back to Evergreen. But she went from Evergreen to the Bunting, and I went from Evergreen to the Bunting, partly because what Evergreen has been doing in interdisciplinary thinking is so many decades ahead of what anybody else has been doing. And there are people in the world who've noticed it.

Sandoz: That's probably a good place to stop.

Meyer-Knapp: I think it's a fine place to stop.