Bill Arney

Interviewed by Eirik Steinhoff

The Evergreen State College oral history project

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FINAL

[Begin part 1 of 2 of Bill Arney on November 22, 2020]

Steinhoff: It's Friday, November 20, 2020. I'm in Olympia. Bill Arney is in San Juan Island. This will be our first session for the Evergreen Oral History project. I think the place to begin would be with the beginning. Bill, could you tell me something about

Arney: I was born in North Carolina. September 18, 1950.

Steinhoff: Great. I know when we spoke last time, you began to tell me a little bit about your family. You began to tell me about going to college. I'd love to hear about family, and then getting to college. There might be some follow-up questions along the way.

Arney: Both of my parents were United States Marines. My father was a sergeant major in the Marine Corps, eventually. I knew him when he was a first sergeant. He was in charge of the military police. When I was a baby, I'm told, the military police would come and pick me up every morning to take me over to the flag raising. My mother would have to call and say, "Have you got Bill again?" to the military police. They would say, "Yes, ma'am," and eventually bring me back. That's one of my first remembrances.

Where to go from there?

Steinhoff: I can actually jump right in and say, sergeant major, what does that signify in terms of the hierarchy? What's your understanding of that position?

Arney: Top dog. Answers to higher-level officers, not lieutenants. He told me a story once that this obnoxious first lieutenant came into his office when he was in Okinawa. He couldn't go to Vietnam because he had too high of a security clearance and he would have been a security risk, apparently if he had gotten captured, but he went to Okinawa.

The story went that this second lieutenant came in and threw his foot up on my dad's desk. He had been in before. My dad reached in the desk and got one of those Marine rulers that has a metal strip in it an hit the guy's shoe and split it open, split the leather. If you know anything about Marines and their shoes, at least the enlisted men are very proud of their shoe-shining abilities. [laughing] But this guy kind of went apeshit, my dad said. "I'm going to have you run up on charges." My dad said, "Sit

down, son. Let me get you an appointment with the colonel," whose office was right next door to my dad's.

He went over and opened the door and said, "Colonel, there's a goddamn second lieutenant here that needs to see you." "What'd he do?" Told him, "Send the sonofabitch in." He said, "Don't you ever come into the sergeant major's office without an appointment again." That gives you an idea of where the sergeant major stood in terms of things.

My mother was a fairly low-ranking enlisted person. She signed up during the war. After she died, we found pictures of her sitting with a bunch of women Marines, as they were called, on a grassy hillside with some pine trees. The thing underneath it was "President Truman's camp in Maryland." This was Camp David before David Eisenhower came along to the White House. She was doing some kind of administrative work for the President. Probably just a detail of women Marines hanging around. I don't know what it was. Those are early memories of early and supplemented later by pictures.

Growing up in the Marine Corps was fabulous. I grew up in the South at Paris Island Marine Station down at Paris Island in South Carolina. I think later Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. I know I went to Camp Lejeune as a teenager after we got back from Japan.

I've often said that one of my earliest memories was going to Sears off the base and getting over to the water fountain and there being two water fountains and four toilets. A water fountain for white people and one for black people, and then two bathrooms each—you know, black women.

My sole memory of that really, besides the layout of things, was that I had this gut-driven attraction to the Negro water fountain because it was filthy, as opposed to the white. I don't understand that, except psychoanalytically, of course. But that was the situation that we lived in off the base. I know that there was racial prejudice in the Marine Corps, although one of my dad's happiest times was when—who was the guy who became Secretary of State later? Big, black general.

Steinhoff: Colin Powell?

Arney: Colin Powell, thank you. He came home very, very happy when Colin Powell was moved up to general because he had total respect for him. On the base, the only questions were, "Can you shoot straight?" and "Are you going to shoot me?" If you got the right answer to those two questions, you were fine. You were a Marine.

It was a lovely way to grow up, in a way. As a kid, I could go to movies for free. Hollywood movies. They raised it to a dime for a major motion picture by the time I got back to Camp Lejeune as a teenager. Free sailing lessons, free swimming pools, and all of that kind of stuff.

We spent three years in Japan as a family. It didn't occur to me until later that this was not a long time after the bombing of Japan. This was in the '50s. Clearly, my dad was there for cleanup and realignment kinds of things. The biggest thing that happened there was just before we left, he had made friends with some people in Japan Sword Company.

Japan Sword Company is the place that had made all the Samurai swords for hundreds of years. One night he came home, and he said, "I have a dinner appointment tomorrow." He never had dinner appointments. "I have to go down to Japan Sword. They're giving me a dinner." Just because they liked him for some reason, I don't know.

The two things he told me later was they put a translator right next to him so that anything that got said around the table—whether it was to him or not—anything that got said got translated. Then they gave him a Marine sword that they had made with his name and everything on it. I've got it sitting in there. It's one of those things. He was totally surprised that they would do that for him. He didn't quite understand why, but he had a way of making friends, I guess.

Those are the early memories, the Marine Corps and all that stuff. By the way, this is a reasonable transition, I suppose. People wonder, why didn't you go into the Marines? It's because of him, my dad. He said, "I've served enough time for both of us. Just go and get an education."

The only tiny blip in that was the night that we were sitting around with the first draft, when they were pulling ping pong ball dates out of the hopper. I watched some of my fraternity brothers just get picked off, and I didn't come in until 248, so I never had to worry about going against my father's wishes of getting an education. [laughing]

Steinhoff: That's so interesting. I've got one or two follow-ups. One would just be a timestamp. You said that you were in Japan for three years?

Arney: Yeah, from age seven to 10. The biggest thing that I did there that I remember is I learned judo, and I became very good at it. I think it's something that infected my way of being very deeply. Because in judo, you don't win by being aggressive. You win by letting your opponent make mistakes and you take advantage of them. And afterwards, you always bow.

Steinhoff: Still that respect.

Arney: Yeah. It's an ideal culture of competition that I think is part of me. The work that I've been doing in the last several years. Forty years, whatever it's been.

Steinhoff: You mentioned going to Sears, and that's when you were young in North Carolina. Was there something comparable in Japan, which is to say I'm imagining that base culture in Japan, there was a lot that was similar from base culture in North Carolina. Maybe I'm wrong about that. But I'm

also imagining that there may have been some thresholds along the lines of visiting Sears, going off base.

Arney: No, not really, because when we went off base, we basically took fieldtrips. I remember going to Tokyo Tower when it was only built up to the observation deck. They hadn't put the spire on the thing yet. Had a lunch there. Just different things of Japanese culture.

Another big thing that happened there—big for me, I think you might understand this—is that I had a black female teacher in, I don't know, fifth grade. Something like that. My biggest visceral memory was that she was kind of drop-dead gorgeous.

She came in one day and said, "You may have heard that the San Francisco Giants are in town playing against the Tokyo something-or-other. Tomorrow night, I'll be having dinner with Willie Mays. If you would like him to sign a baseball, bring it tomorrow morning." My dad went and requisitioned a U.S. Marine Corps ball and Willie Mays signed it. I was the only one that brought a ball in. I still have that ball.

He also gave her, though, a 1960s team ball. Everybody on the team had signed it. Somebody stole this out of our house. They didn't steal the—we don't have a key to the door. We don't worry about anything here. But it wasn't long ago that somebody took that team ball.

Steinhoff: Amazing.

Arney: But I've still got the Willie Mays ball. "To Bill, Tokyo, Japan, 1960."

Steinhoff: Wow! That's actually a nice transition as well. What was your teacher teaching? What was the classroom like?

Arney: Standard school. She was the humanities side of things, and then there was some guy that did science-y things. Mr. Linker. I don't remember her name, but Mr. Linker was the science guy at the time.

Steinhoff: You mentioned that your father was intent on you continuing your education past high school. I'm guessing, or maybe I'm remembering, that he went straight into the Marines, didn't go to college?

Arney: Yeah. He had some trouble that I never was able to piece together with the family, including getting hit on the head with a cast iron frying pan. That didn't come out literally until his deathbed. Pam and I sort of nursed him into death at his house. It came out at that point that somebody in his family—probably his father—had hit him with a frying pan and cracked his skull, so he kind of wanted to get away. [laughing]

Steinhoff: Where did he grow up? Where was he from?

Arney: He was from North Carolina, sort of backcountry. His brother, Hiram—classic—ran an Ace Hardware store. The last time I saw him he was pulled up in front of the Ace Hardware store and he and his son, Johnny Arney—he was named after my dad, John Arney, and Hiram's son was Johnny—were both sitting—classic, stereotypical Southern scene—in rockers on the front porch of the damn hardware store. They said, "Hey, Bill." I hadn't seen them in 10 years. "Hey, Bill, sit down. You want a Coke?" [laughing] And just carried on from there. My dad didn't have a lot to do with his family, but he did stay in touch with Hiram.

Steinhoff: What about your mother?

Arney: What about her?

Steinhoff: Where was she from?

Arney: She was from Montana. We have a painting that somebody did of a photograph of their house. Just a watercolor. It's just a two-story, very small house probably for six or seven children out on the Montana prairie. That was her life growing up.

Steinhoff: They clearly met in the Marines.

Arney: Yeah. They met at a bar. The story was that somebody picked a fight with my dad in a bar. He had been playing poker and he had $3,000 in cash in his pocket. He looked around for the most beautiful woman in the room and went over to my mom and gave her the cash and said, "Hold onto this. I've got to take care of this guy." [laughing] He said, "Well, she gave it back, so I married her."

Steinhoff: That's incredible. So, North Carolina to Japan, back to North Carolina. Camp Lejeune. When you were telling your story a moment ago about the draft, there was a fraternity involved, so you were already in school.

Arney: No, that was later. Down in North Carolina, I was mostly in the Scouts. A Marine base is a great place to be in the Boy Scouts because there's all the camping stuff out there, and your trip leaders are really good campers and things like that.

Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, was just a dream place for me to be a young person. I got to take free sailing lessons. The only trouble was that the girl that I liked—I was just a wee thing, but really liked this girl—was an officer's daughter. The officers lived literally a bus ride away from the enlisted men's housing. But in general, I just had a fabulous time on the Marine bases.

Then we went to Japan and came back eventually to Colorado. I came back to Colorado in eighth grade. When my dad retired, he got a job at the credit union as a teller to keep a little money coming in. Then he got a job in San Diego. I told him I didn't want to go because I wanted to go to the University of Colorado. That would have been a year, year and a half, away.

Things didn't work out in San Diego, so he came back and bought another house just down the street from our other house and got back together. Then we're getting on to my going on to the University of Colorado.

Steinhoff: Was there a Marine connection with Colorado? How did you guys end up there?

Arney: He as on recruiting duty in Denver. That was one of the last things he did after getting back from—we couldn't go to Okinawa when he was there during the Vietnam War, so he would just call every so often and say, "I'm fine still." I just kind of hung out there. Actually, got into high school and did well there, and on to Colorado.

I think I told you I heard this comedian recently. He said, "When you get ready to go to college, if you come from my stock, you just ask your parents what state you live in, and you send an application to the university of that." That's literally what I did. [laughing] I was the valedictorian in the class, or a co-valedictorian in the class, just because I loved learning. I just applied to the University of Colorado, and they took me in.

Oh, by the way. The Navy Foundation—the Marine Corps don't think of themselves this way, but they're an adjunct of the Navy—had scholarships. My tuition was $200 a semester and they gave me a scholarship for as many semesters as I needed, which was only six, so I got my degree in three years, my BA.

Then I wrote to them, and I said, "Okay, I've got my BA. I can start paying you back now." They said, "No, no. You're going to graduate school. Don't worry about it. We'll get back to you later. Let us know when you finished." [laughing]

Steinhoff: Wow.

Arney: Yeah, that's student finances.

Steinhoff: For sure, but also a kind of patronage or a kind of support for—

Arney: Yeah, absolutely. So, co-valedictorian, which suggests that there must have been some pretty teachers, or at least good classes. I'm curious to hear a little bit about that high school experience.

Arney: All of that. I just sent a letter to an Ed Butterfield in Grand Junction not too long ago. It was basically "Are you still alive?" He wrote back and said, "Yeah." He was a biology teacher, and we just had a great time together.

He did pick favorites. He had six or seven students that he really favored. I knew I was one when I came into his room one day after school and I said, "You got anything I could do?" He said, "No, but you're welcome to use the lab back there any time you want." I thought, oh, cool. He was a real force in my learning back then.

Steinhoff: It sounds like he liberated the lab for you. What happened in the lab? What was attractive?

Arney: Whatever you wanted to do. His point was you want to learn some biology? There's a bunch of stuff back in there that you could learn with. Help yourself. You don't need a teacher to go there.

Another guy was Bill McCurley. Shortly after I graduated, he got fired for being a gay guy. He taught calculus. I still remember, he came in the first day of calculus and he said, "Look, there's only two ideas in calculus, and they're related to one another. Differentiation and integration. That's all we're going to do for a year now." [laughing] He was just terrific.

I went to college planning to be a math major because of him. The first thing I had to take was calculus. I knew it all, so that was a nice, easy pass in my first year of college because of Bill, or Mr. McCurley.

I had a Latin teacher who was terrific, too. Mrs. Hutchinson, I think. She just loved teaching people this crazy language. We read Caesar's wars, like all the basic Latin people do, I guess. Worked through the whole thing.

I was a good swimmer, too. Terry Anderson was this English teacher, but he was the swimming coach. He got me up to the point where I was a state champion in sprints, freestyle sprints. That was fun. But he also wrote a letter for—what was it called? The trophy is still sitting in there. The Don Brown Sportsmanship Award. This was an award that was given out at the first, big, major all-state swim match of each year at the University of Denver.

The only reason I had any aspiration for that was this guy, who was an extraordinary swimmer—I was not extraordinary, I was pretty good, but this guy was extraordinary, and he had the most beautiful body. He won it the year before. He was a year ahead of me. He won this award. I thought, I'd really like to win that, so Terry wrote this great letter for me. and I won the award.

You're making me think about all these things I rarely think about, but they're obviously in there somewhere.

Steinhoff: I think that's part of my intention, actually, is to, insofar as your vocation has been teaching, among everything else that you've done, but I think that—

Arney: Mostly learning.

Steinhoff: Yes.

Arney: I don't mean to correct you, but we can talk about that.

Steinhoff: That might be helpful, actually, to here how these early experiences would inform that claim.

Arney: Yeah. Most of the teachers I had were mostly interested in me learning rather than me being taught. When I went to the University of Colorado, I got the acceptance letter, but then came this letter from the Director of the Honors Program, Walter Weir.

He was a pretty old guy, and his specialty was Ancient Greek stuff. He had set up the Honors Program as Colorado's first effort to do non-graded studies. They got their own grades—Honors pass or fail. Everybody got Honors, so it was a bit like Evergreen. You can't fail, so just come and learn stuff.

Walter Weir writes to me and says, "I want you to be in the Honors Program, but I also want you to be in my seminar." He did everything in terms of seminars, 15 people to a seminar. He got faculty from all over the university. He said, "I want you to be in my seminar, Greek and Roman stuff, and we will meet at my house out on the edges of Boulder." Beautiful house, as you might imagine, with a full professor there. "And if you haven't got a car, I will drive you out there every Thursday night and we'll sit around and talk about Greek and Roman things."

Greek and Roman? I didn't even know where Rome was, or that it was that old, or something. But he didn't care. He just didn't care. He just wanted to show you how people can think, meaning him. [laughing]

After that he said, "All right, you go take some of the classes now from some of these other people." I finished up my final science requirement. When I went in, I was going to be a pre-med. I had done a lot of stuff in high school for being pre-med. Went and watched operations and shuttled some of the Vietnam guys around the Army hospital across the way. I was definitely going to be in pre-med.

Between Weir and some of the other stuff that I took in my first year, my eyes just went, whoa, this is a lot more interesting than trying to get a yellow precipitate up there in that lab. [laughing] So, I switched out of science-y things. I got a minor in mathematics. I couldn't finish the major in mathematics because I hated applied mathematics, and you had to take a class on applied mathematics down in the Engineering School, and I just said, "No, I'm not going to do that anymore."

My favorite class in math was set theory. It was just abstract mathematics, basically introduction to abstract mathematics. We had a terrific professor. His name was Taylor, but I don't remember his first name. But one time he was absent, and the author of the textbook that we were using was in the Math Department at University of Colorado, so when this guy Taylor was absent one day, he got the author of the textbook to come in and teach the class.

Again, this is a formative experience, because somebody said—I forget his name, Dr. So-and-So—"We're having trouble with this number six on page 42 here. Could you help us out?" He leans over the book. [laughing] He looks at the book and he says, "This book." He looks at the book. After

about a minute of doing this, he says, "Seems trivial." He turned around and starts writing on the board. Fills up that wall and then that wall over there. Then he steps back, and he says, "Oh! I see why it's not trivial." [laughing] Cool. That's all I could think. Cool. That's kind of how I want to be.

How's that? Is that enough stuff?

Steinhoff: It's barely scratching the surface, Bill. It's amazing stuff. The way you've set things up, though, right now makes for a big question, which is, how do you get from that scene to sociology?

Arney: I was a sociology major.

Steinhoff: Right, but you came in on the pre-med track, or with that as the ambition. You got swerved off into Ancient Greece and Roman by Professor Weir. You got turned on to seminar. You got turned on to set theory. You got turned on to this kind of life of the mind, where you can set a trap for yourself in your own textbook, and you watch the professor, right? At some point, you get introduced to sociology. Maybe there's something from high school that got you there? I'm curious about that.

Arney: No, nothing in high school, of course. I just took a couple sociology classes in my first year and it was exactly the same experience there as with Walter Weir. This was during the Vietnam War, so people had a lot to talk about if you're sociologist and stuff. I sat there listening, and sometimes participating in seminars, and my eyes just went, boing! Really? You can do this as a profession?

That's what I did, and the combination of mathematics and sociology came naturally, so to speak, because they had a kind of a program in mathematical sociology at the graduate school.

I suppose it's worth telling you how I got into graduate school. Three years in undergraduate school, and then I went into the see the Director of the graduate program and I said, "Professor Adams, I would like to join the graduate school here." This is an old guy. I'm looking at my hair. This was like Merrill Adams's hair. He was a pretty old guy.

He says, "Well, we have a lot of students in sociology. Most of them really, they're avoiding the war. Can I ask your grade point average?" I said, "3.9 something-or-other." I was in the Honors Program. He looks at me and says, "Were you in my class in Sociological Theory?" I said, "Yes, sir."

It was a required class. Met in the movie theater on the hill in Boulder. Three hundred students. Merrill Adams lecturing on sociological theory. "Yes, sir, I was in your class." He looked at me and said, "You came to my office hours several times." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Oh, well, we can get you a fellowship here. That's not a problem. But if you wanted to go study with my professor at Harvard, Talcott Parsons, dean of American sociology, I can set you up pretty easily to go there." I said, "Well, sir, if it's all the same to you, I think I'd rather stay here."

I got hooked up with this guy, Tom Mayer, who is in mathematical sociology. It was a field that was just coming along, and he was adding to it. He basically gave me a PhD thesis to do a time series model of fertility in the United States and all that. I did it and got a PhD three years later. Six years, high school to Dartmouth College.

Do you want to hear moving on to Dartmouth?

Steinhoff: Not yet Bill. I see you want to get us there, but I'm now curious about, well, Harvard. For some people, that would be the most delicious bait. For you, "If it's all the same to you, sir, I'll just stay here." I'm curious to know how that offer signified to you?

Arney: It's easy. I was completely ignorant of Harvard. I knew the name, Talcott Parsons, because Merrill Adams had taught him to us. But I had no notion about higher education and what happens above all this.

Steinhoff: Now we can maybe tap into the story about the lottery and the draft, and that experience as being—basically, in that milieu, in the fraternity, and watching some of your peers get drafted. And with you own upbringing. I would be curious to hear a little bit of that.

Arney: My big brother in the fraternity, his number literally came up number two, his birthday, so things quieted down a lot around that table at that point. He's the guy who went to Vietnam and became a medic because he didn't want to kill anybody. Then he re-upped after that. Went back as a medic for a second go.

What's catching your ear about this?

Steinhoff: Your father didn't want you to follow his footsteps into the service. I'm thinking about—maybe there's a little bit of C. Wright Mills here, *The Sociological Imagination*. I guess I'm curious to hear your own coming into awareness. You mentioned earlier that sitting in sociology classes during the Vietnam War, there was a lot to talk about. Your eyes opened, your horizons expanded.

There's a deeper thing here, which is you're starting school in '68, you're graduating in '71. Evergreen starts in '71. This is my own separate theory, which we don't need to pursue, but to create a new college at that time is to mess with the lottery and the draft and so on. On the one hand, people are getting funneled into the war machine. But if you create an education machine, you're creating something that sucks people out of, or has the potential to suck people out of the war machine. That's a bigger, structural thing, and I'm just curious about your own relation to that historical moment, relative to war on the one hand, education on the other. It might be too abstract a question, but that's part of my own curiosity.

Arney: I can give you another story that points in the direction you're talking about. Oh! This is just a kind of cartoon. There was a professor of sociology, Ed Rose, who had stark white hair and always wore hippie kinds of things and beads and stuff. Long story short, Pepsi said, "We want to do a commercial in which you sit on the library lawn, and a little girl will come up and hand you a flower, and we'll film it." He lived off the royalties from that commercial for about 10 years, I think. [laughing] But that's the kind of invasion of the culture into the times.

But the bigger one was I'm pretty sure I was still an undergraduate, so before '71, students assembled on the library lawn. We were going to vote to close the university. There were about 7,000 people on the library lawn. A car drives across the sidewalks, and out gets the President of the university. [laughing] He said, "I'd appreciate the opportunity to speak, if it comes up." I thought, that's pretty cool. People protesting, all that stuff. I'm just sitting there listening, like I usually did.

Somebody said, "Okay, President Thieme, you want to say something?" "Thank you, I would. I respect entirely what you're doing here, and I can certainly understand your motivation for wanting to close the university. But I want to let you know that I will not do that. You don't have to go to classes. There may be classes that won't be held, but I won't close the university." I thought, that's pretty cool, too. [laughing]

What happened afterwards is that I went to classes. Like I said the other day in a class, "I'm turning really white here as the sunshine is coming in." I went to classes. I went to a philosophy class that I was in, and the guy said, "I've been talking about all this stuff in philosophy, but I want to tell you that there's a theory of the just war, and that's what I want to talk about today." "Oh, cool."

Went to the chemistry class and the guy said, "You're going to be hearing a lot about a chemistry thing that's going on in Vietnam now. It's called Agent Orange. I want to give you an hour to an hour and a half introduction to this that's going to be on your horizon that you really need to know something about."

There were seven of us in this 150-seat auditorium. Again, I just thought, cool. Let me have it. That's where I got a real sense of what a university could be, and the idea that I could possibly be a part of that was, coming from my background, very unlikely. But it happened.

The mathematics stuff, I think I told you, it just happened that this guy had a grant. He gave me a research assistantship. Got me my PhD.

At the same time, I was working as a graduate assistant at the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. It was on a project called "The Outcomes of Higher Education." It was the first time that anybody had started talking about that in the country that there would be outcomes from

higher education. We did these various studies, Sid Mesick and I—one of the graduate students—polling people around the country to see what they thought of outcomes of higher education. There's a couple of pamphlets in the library that came out of this.

Basically, we said, "This doesn't make a lot of sense. There's really no way to talk about this that makes any sense whatsoever. But here's what we came up with and here's a list of outcomes of higher education." The funding agency took it away and sent it over to ACT, and they ran with it. That's where we got "Outcomes of Higher Education," which are still floating around, which breeds stupidity, like student success and all that. [laughing] If you've got outcomes, right?

Steinhoff: That's right.

Arney: You've got to have some success somewhere.

Steinhoff: I'm so glad that you've mentioned this, actually. That's '72 to '74—I'm consulting the cheat sheet here—so that's while you're doing your doctorate work.

Arney: Yeah. I had two jobs and it was great.

Steinhoff: Here, I need to betray my own ignorance relative to sociology.

Arney: I've got a lot of that, too, so never mind. [laughter] We'll support each other here.

Steinhoff: Good. But I think you'd mentioned that mathematical sociology was an emerging field.

Arney: Yeah.

Steinhoff: My appetite for sociology developed out of much more the qualitative side. I've dabbled, I can say, so I'm curious to hear your own sense of that emergent paradigm. It clearly speaks to your own appetite for mathematics, the fact that you could fly through calculus, and that you encountered an obstacle with the applied mathematics requirement.

Arney: Yeah.

Steinhoff: I'm just curious to hear a little bit about these kinds of disciplinary confluences and your own sense of them.

Arney: Not sure quite what to say about that except I got hooked up with Tom Mayer. I think I was his first PhD student, so he had an investment in getting me through. He helped me. I would write my dissertation and he would revise and say, "Okay, try this, try that."

We went back and forth for six, eight months on a spectral analytic model, distributed lag model, which was a mathematical thing coming mostly out of econometrics, and he wanted to bring it into sociology. It's a statistical way of thinking about relationships where the relation is not static at one timepoint, but that the relationship can be—there's a variable that five years earlier is going to predict

something now, and there's another on three years, and the effect is smaller than the five-year. That's what I got was a distributed lag model on U.S. fertility rates.

It was no great shakes, I don't think. It wasn't anything terribly important, although we did a couple of papers published out of it. One was in a pretty well-known series of book called *Sociological Methodology*. It came out with one a year for about seven or eight years and we got a paper in that. Tom got a paper in that, and I got to ride along. [laughing]

That's how I got there. What I was going to tell you before is Tom said, "When you go to apply for a job, here's a letter. You can run it out as many times as you want and send it wherever you want, and I'll just sign them." I think I sent out about 80 letters of application.

I had about three or four, maybe five, interviews around the country. Somewhere in this, I got a call from a guy name Joel Levine at Dartmouth College. He was a mathematical sociologist at Dartmouth College. Turned out that he had been a research mate of Tom Mayer's when they were both at the University of Michigan. Joel gets me on the phone and he says, "I understand you've got an interview up at the University of Vermont." I said, "Yeah, I do." He said, "Any way you could stop by Dartmouth on the way and just let us hear from you?" I said, "Yeah, if you tell me where Dartmouth is." [laughing] I figured I knew nothing about the Ivy Leagues from my class background. I figured Dartmouth, that's somewhere near New York. It's gotta be the New York City environs, I learned. [laughing]

I did it. I flew first to Boston, then up to Dartmouth. Landed in the snow, and then went on to the University of Vermont on the same trip. Dartmouth calls me about a week later and says, "We'd like to offer you a job as assistant professor of sociology." "I accept. Fine. I enjoyed the snow."

About two weeks later, the chairman, Stan Udy, calls me up and he says, "We're really glad that you're going to join the faculty here. There's just one little thing that's come up. It's just a small, bureaucratic hitch. It's not a problem, but we'll take care of it. There's this new thing at the college. It's called an Affirmative Action Officer. She said that because you didn't apply for the position, you're not eligible to get it." [laughing] He said, "This doesn't make much sense to me. It's just a bureaucratic that we'll get cleared up here really soon. But just wanted to let you know we can't send you the appointment letter right now. Probably four, five days from now you'll get the appointment letter."

Long story short, I really came to enjoy being around Margaret, the Affirmative Action Officer. First time I met her, I said, "I'm Bill Arney, sociology." She said, "Oh, you're Bill Arney." [laughing] She was very good, good to be around.

Steinhoff: Bill, this is 1974.

Arney: Yeah.

Steinhoff: You are all of 24 years old?

Arney: Yeah, I started teaching at Dartmouth a few days before my 24th birthday in September.

Steinhoff: Wow. What was that like? What was that transition? You hadn't done teaching in grad school, or you had?

Arney: I had been a teaching assistant, too, along the way.

Steinhoff: Okay.

Arney: Not sure it did anything for me.

Steinhoff: That was part of your apprenticeship. You were doing the statistical modeling with Tom Mayer, and you were getting some trained up in the teaching as such, which qualified you for this job.

Arney: It got me the job. [laughing]

Steinhoff: It got you the job. What I was about to observe was there was an old boys' network. Maybe they weren't so old, but Tom Mayer, Joel Levine—then suddenly, the chair has to acknowledge that 1974, new world, where there actually are protocols, etc. Did you have to make an application? How did they finesse that?

Arney: No. He did what he said he was going to do. He said, "Just take a couple of days and we'll clear it up." They didn't tell me how they cleared it up. I'm not sure I would have understood what it meant because this was the first time an affirmative action officer had been around in my life.

Steinhoff: Exactly. And theirs, it sounds like.

Arney: And theirs, yes. It was a new thing. "We've got this new thing here." [laughing]

Steinhoff: Exactly, so we could maybe say that you got grandfathered in.

Arney: If I weren't so young, you could say that. [laughter]

Steinhoff: But it was a previous paradigm, like if we're acknowledging this old boys' network, and that you were wandering around in the Northeast—UVM, Dartmouth—

Arney: Yes. They were just doing things the way they'd always done things.

Steinhoff: Exactly.

Arney: They didn't know any better.

Steinhoff: Exactly. I'm mindful of our time. We've gone for about an hour, so I'm thinking we should check into say taking a five-minute break. I'm completely flexible to whatever your preference might be.

Arney: Yeah, I've just got to go stoke the stove.

Steinhoff: Great. I'll hit pause on the recording and let's just catch back up at 10 minutes after 1:00.

[End part 1 of 2 of Bill Arney on November 22, 2020]

[Begin part 2 of 2 of Bill Arney on November 22, 2020]

Steinhoff: We're back. We've probably got another 50 minutes or so in this round. I think we've got you into the snow, or maybe it's not snowing when you return to New Hampshire. Get us from Colorado to New Hampshire. What do we need to know about that transit?

Arney: From Colorado to New Hampshire? What do you mean?

Steinhoff: Did you drive? Were you by yourself?

Arney: Yeah, we drove. We had a young child with us, and a friend of my first wife, Debbie, went with us to help take care of John, this guy who's now a 38-year-old tech guy over in Eastern Washington. Got there. Set up house. Started learning about heating with wood, which is what I was just doing. Kind of got it into my blood, I suppose.

Moving to New Hampshire was a place I'd never been before. Never thought about existing. I'd tell the kids that there were always three or four days in the winter in New Hampshire where it got to 40 below. It was drop-dead gorgeous because all the water freezes out of the air and the trees turn into icicles. That's one of my memories.

We were also talking this weekend about the way my two younger ones loved to golf. I said, "Back in New Hampshire, there's a ski jump on the golf course." [laughing] When you're not using it for one thing, use it for another.

Steinhoff: Exactly, multiuse territory. What was it like at Dartmouth? You're coming from a well-resourced state school, the University of Colorado, and landing into Dartmouth, one of the Ivies. I'm curious to hear about that experience coming into your first job as faculty.

Arney: I came into it, as you might imagine, with almost complete ignorance of what it meant to be a faculty member, and what it meant to be in the Ivy League. Like I said, the Ivy League, I thought, was something that was gathered around New York City. Turns out that's not true. I was a very naïve guy, but it's like you fake it until you make it, that kind of thing. That's pretty much the way I felt.

Steinhoff: I'm remembering from the team-teaching text that you'd prepared that you had an early experience of team teaching.

Arney: Yeah. This has another large dose of Bill's naivete in it. They assigned me to teach in my first—were we on quarters or semesters?—I forget, but I think it was my first quarter—a class on population. I got four students to sign up. Good, Ivy League chair of the Sociology Department that he was, he said, "Don't worry about it. It's not a big deal. Just teach them." I said, "Okay, I can do that."

But I started sniffing around and found out—I wanted to know why nobody was taking this. It turned out that there had been a population class offered, I think, the summer just prior to this fall quarter. I found out who had taught it and I went to see her. Somebody named Donella Meadows—

Dana, as I came to know her. She was the author of *The Limits to Growth*. Big, big, big, bigtime professor. The college had hired her without portfolio basically. They hired her and said, "We'll give you a wing of the Business School down there for whatever it is that you want to do, and whatever you want to call yourself, professor of, let us know." She named herself a professor of environmental studies. It was one of the first times that those terms had been used in academe ever.

I went down to visit the professor of environmental studies without knowing anything about Ivy League protocol or anything like that. I said, "I hear you taught this population class. That's what I'm going to do, too." She, in her extraordinary generosity, said, "Well, why don't we teach it together next year this time? Team teach your four students now, and I'll get a few more next fall." I said, "Great."

We went back to the Sociology Department, and I said, "I found out why there was this low enrollment from this woman, Dana Meadows." All the guys start rolling their eyes, these professors of sociology. I said, "She suggested that we could teach population together next fall."

Long story short, it turned out that they had just denied her an adjunct appointment in Sociology a couple of weeks before this. She just wanted to be recognized in the Sociology Department, too, and the boys didn't allow her to do that. It was an all-boys department at that time. But the department chair said, "Oh, I guess it's okay if she wants to just teach with you. We can give you your course credit and all that stuff."

Anyway, that was my first foray into college politics, I suppose you would say. [laughing] But she was a completely charming person, completely amenable to doing whatever needed to be done to have a good time there.

Steinhoff: This is striking me as yet another instance of a kind of tectonic encounter, these two different modes. *Limits to Growth* is probably in 1972 is my guess.

Arney: Yeah, about that.

Steinhoff: It's very contemporaneous with Evergreen's birthday. That's what I remember. That was just a breakout book. Hugely influential. As you're indicating, the old boys hired you and denied her position.

Arney: It wouldn't have cost them a dime because she was paying for herself to be there with her grants and everything. It's just the obnoxiousness.

Steinhoff: Yeah. It's a taste of campus politics of department turf. The gender stuff is there. But it's also you're connecting with a contemporary. I'm curious to hear a little bit more about that relationship with her, this idea of team teaching and just that experience of working together in the classroom.

Arney: She was older. She was the real deal when it came to the professorial ranks. She had been at MIT, and she and Dennis, her husband then, had worked on *Limits to Growth* together.

It was not a big deal, for her or for me. I suppose, if I want to infer, she was doing me a favor. Basically, I don't want to take away your possible enrollments, and you might learn something. My attitude was, well, I might learn something. [laughing]

If you want to really extrapolate, that's my attitude about most things. I think I'm very naïve about ranks and protocols. At least, if I'm not naïve, I don't respect it very well. I think I've actually gotten to something that's probably a kind of core of me that—sergeant major doesn't respect anybody below the full colonel. I had no trouble approaching Dana.

When Michel Foucault came with this huge professorship for a week at Dartmouth, I went and knocked on the door of the house that they gave him for the time. This guy set up this professorship, this oil guy, and he bought a house that was right near the hospital, so it was extraordinarily expensive and just waiting for some really, really well-incomed Dartmouth graduate to buy it. This guy, I think, bought it right out from under a couple of other people.

I just went up and knocked on the door and introduced myself. "I'm working on a book on obstetrics and you're a big motivation." He got this big grin on his face, and he said, "Well, come in, come in. I'll be here for one week. You can come to my seminars. Of course, those are open, but you should come watch these people come in and pay me court." [laughing] So, I got to sit around in this living room and watch all these high professors get taken down a few notches, usually, by Foucault. It was great fun.

Steinhoff: You're underway with the book on obstetrics. You've been influenced by Foucault. I don't imagine he was on the curriculum at the University of Colorado.

Arney: No. The way I heard about him was very odd. It has to do with the Affirmative Action Officer, too. There was a woman in the department, Joan Smith. I don't think she was there before I got there, but she may have been. I may have misspoken when I said it was an all-boys club. Joan was probably there.

She was a Marxist and she introduced me to this book. Foucault's book. In retrospect, it's quite funny, because—I said, "Did he do anything with your work in there?" She says, "Oh, yes, I got a footnote." She didn't get a footnote. That was just a lie. [laughing] But we all do that once in a while, right? But she's the one that introduced me to that book.

When I got my first sabbatical—at Dartmouth, you get a sabbatical after three years, so I got a sabbatical, and I went to England to finish up the obstetrics book and get into some of the libraries over

there. I just folded *Discipline and Punish* into the obstetrics book, trying to talk about new structures of power in medicine. Worked with David Armstrong over there. He was doing a lot of sociology and medicine, influenced by Foucault and other cats like that.

I had written to him just to get an appointment in the Department of Community Medicine. He said, "Well, you're working on obstetrics. How about if you take obstetrics and I'll take the rest of medicine?" So, two books came out at about the same time.

Although later on, when I got back to Dartmouth, I showed this book to a guy named Bernie Bergan. He was a professor of sociology and in the Department of Psychiatry in the Medical School. He read the book and he said, "What you say happened in obstetrics happened in all of medicine." I said, "We could work out something and maybe do a book together." That's what we did. That was *Medicine and the Management of Living* that came out of that collaboration. That was just before I came to Evergreen.

Steinhoff: The influence of Foucault seems seismic for you.

Arney: Oh, yeah. It was one of those eye-opening things that I experienced so often. Why? Because the histories of obstetrics that were being written were not interesting, and they struck me as kind of naïve. Foucault's work helped me say something that I think was not so naïve. Basically, that there's a new structure of power in obstetrics from the time when women were having babies with other women around them.

I spent a lot of time in the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine library. I went to the Royal College of Obstetricians and gynecologists, and I started telling them what I was doing, and the librarian motions me over and said, "Come around the desk, please." She reaches down and picks up a manhole cover and flips on a light switch and said, "Dr. Arney, the books you require are below. Please help yourself." [laughing]

I ended up at the Wellcome Institute because I was trying to work at the British Library, and every time I would put in a request for a book, I'd get this pink slip back that said, "The book you require was destroyed in bombing in World War II," so I had to go to the Wellcome, where they'd kept their books well contained in the bomb shelter below. That was a great time.

Steinhoff: Did you have to take a ladder down there?

Arney: Yeah, there was a little ladder.

Steinhoff: Just incredible. The history of obstetrics in a bunker at the Wellcome Institute.

Arney: Yes. Well, because they're useless books. Nobody needs them. "Dr. Arney, the books you require." [laughing]

Steinhoff: It's incredible. Okay, this is really very interesting because it's also occurring to me that the kind of research that you're doing—archival stuff, spelunking practically, and basically a kind of the history of ideas, the history of institutions, the history of practices—doesn't sound like stuff that would have been coming up with a PhD for mathematical sociology.

Arney: No, it wouldn't, and it wasn't. I guess I've never been one to come up to something interesting and say, "Oh, no, I'm a blah blah blah." Which frankly, I think, has helped me a lot at Evergreen. If I wanted to be a blah blah blah at Evergreen, I think I would have died, because people don't act that way. The good ones, anyway. [laughing]

Steinhoff: Yeah. But I'm also hearing that you're continuing your learning, you're continuing your development. You have the relationship with Meadows. You reach out to Foucault, having had him drawn to your attention by Joan Smith. You're in the UK, working in collaboration with David Armstrong, who must have been a little bit more senior than you, or got more established?

Arney: Not a lot, but, yeah, he was more established.

Steinhoff: But he takes you in and divvies up the labor.

Arney: Yeah.

Steinhoff: I'm also thinking about Foucault and biopower and the right to give life or to withhold life. He's thinking through some of this stuff. Did he read your work? Tell me more about that relationship. He was there for that week but tell me how that helped.

Arney: I sent a copy of the book to him once it came out. It was a University of Chicago Press. He wrote a very nice, proforma letter, which I still have, of course. I don't know if he even read it, but I just wanted to acknowledge him in a more direct way.

I also got to work at the University of Edinburgh during that sabbatical. I came back for winter quarter and then went in the spring to Edinburgh and got an honorary appointment in community medicine at the University of Edinburgh. David said, "Just write to Sir John Brotherston up there." I had to go look up, how do you write a letter to a "sir"? [laughing] It turns out you say, "Dear Sir." They were "Love to have you here, whoever you are." It was just great.

Steinhoff: How was that book received?

Arney: I don't know. Yeah, I really don't know. I think it didn't make any big bombshells or anything. But I got to know Barbara Ehrenreich through it. The way I got to know her was I knew her work from the stuff that she did with Dierdre English on midwives and so on, so I knew her work. Then at Dartmouth—again, a place with money—I got to invite her up to give a lecture, and we got to know one another a little bit there. She wrote a blurb for Bernie's and my book on *Medicine and the Management*

of Living. She blurbed on the back of that, so she liked my work well enough to say something nice about it. But I never really kept track of how these things landed. I was more interested in doing them.

Steinhoff: I'm getting that sense, actually. It's you're in whatever the thing is. Something else is drawn to your attention that you happen to be engaged by, whether it's, I don't know, there's 7,000 of my students on the lawn. What's going to happen next? Oh! I'm going to go to class, and I learn about this, and I learn about that. Or now I'm doing mathematical sociology, being mentored in this particular new model. Now I'm at Dartmouth. Now I'm reading some book that Joan Smith pressed upon me. Now I'm in the seminar with Foucault, kind of inside but also observing. It seems like there's a kind of willingness to be influenced.

Arney: Naivete, maybe, is a better way to put it. [laughing]

Steinhoff: Yes!

Arney: I never had the capacity to get the least bit inspired by anything . . . by my position.

Steinhoff: Right. You mentioned the community medicine piece with the University of Edinburgh, and then at Dartmouth, you also had an appointment. Was it in the Medical School? Tell me a little bit about that.

Arney: The Department of Community Medicine. I was hired by a research project in obstetrics. It was one of the first efforts to regionalize care of neonatal infants, infants in neonatal care. The big push was if somebody's having trouble in the small hospital, can we get them to the big hospital in Hanover where they've got a neonatal intensive care unit?

This was one of the first projects to regionalize neonatal intensive care. There was one center in Vermont. Jerry Lucey was the head of that, and he was also the Chief Editor of *Pediatrics*, I think, but some very big editorial appointment. It was his name that got the money, and then George Little was the Director of Neonatal Intensive Care at Dartmouth. George hired me to do all of the statistics and do interviewing and things like that of whatever projects I wanted to do as part of that grant.

At one point, I was literally walking around the halls, and this guy said, "Oh, you're with the perinatal thing." He was the Chair of the Department of Community Medicine. He said, "Would you like an appointment here?" I said, "Yeah, I guess." "We don't have any money for you, but you can get an appointment and put it on your resume." I said, "Okay."

He was a very bigshot in—no, Jack Wennberg was the bigshot in Community Medicine. I forget the chairman's name. Jack Wennberg was the one who did what's called small area variations studies in medicine. One of his first great discoveries was that there are 10 counties in Vermont, and you could tell when an obstetrician moved from one county to another by tracking Caesarian births, because, as he

pointed out, surgeons want to do surgery, so when an obstetrical surgeon moves, the operation rate will move with him. He took off from the early paper of small area variations studies in Vermont and built an empire of variations in neonatal stuff and all other kinds of things. Anyway, this guy was the head of the Department of Community Studies and he said, "Yeah, we'll just give you an appointment here."

Steinhoff: I'm hearing that that is on the strength of the scholarship of the obstetrics because people knew you as, oh, you're somebody that does that kind of thing. But then what you just described, you were doing interviewing, you were walking the halls, and statistics, so that still was part of your profile, the mathematical sociology piece.

Arney: Right. We were collecting data on whether or not this had any good effects. Of course, it did.

Steinhoff: This would have been late '70s.

Arney: Yeah.

Steinhoff: This is a sidebar. I don't want to distract us, but I was born in 1974. Both of my parents are pediatricians. We moved to India in 1980. My father was a virologist. My mother was doing community health, basically. We can do a whole separate sidebar on that, but there's an interesting resonance for me here, especially the timeline, that we moved to India just around the time that you're making your own transition.

But is there anything else to say about Dartmouth? I want to get us to Evergreen before we close out our first session here, but I'm curious to hear maybe about—we've heard a lot about your colleagues, your encounters in the hallway, some of the other institutional stuff, but maybe students. Something about your own experience as a teacher? You're still very young, but you're involved in a lot of things. I'm wondering whether there's anything to add about the Dartmouth time.

Arney: I'm not sure there is. It was a good job. I was surprised I did not get tenure, but in retrospect, not surprised at all because the one book with the University of Chicago Press was out and there was another one in the pipeline, so I thought, eh, that's pretty good.

But Joan Smith, the one who said she had the footnote in *Discipline and Punish*, she was a Marxist, like I said, and she was one of the last to get fired for being a Marxist. Of course, they don't fire you for being a Marxist, but they make up reasons for firing you. She came up for tenure about two years before I did, I think. She goes off in this kerfuffle. Lands on her feet at NYU or somewhere.

You want to stop the recording for just a minute? I want to go get some water.

Steinhoff: No problem.

[Recorder turned off and back on]

Arney: The end of the Joan Smith story is that the President was overheard to say that "those guys in the Department of Sociology will never have a hand in the running of the school again."

So, when I came up for tenure, I had the unanimous support of my department. One guy, a black guy, felt that I was a racist, and he was reluctant to vote for me, but he did. And I got the endorsement of the Divisional Dean, the Dean for the Social Sciences. Then I got called into the uber-Dean and he said, "The President has not approved your tenure application."

That was that. I had to move on. They actually did give me a one-year extension if I wanted to stay, so I was promoted to Associate Professor but without the possibility of staying on.

Steinhoff: That's, I think, a very typical Ivy move.

Arney: Really?

Steinhoff: Yes. I don't know the details, but David Graeber, anthropologist, had an appointment at Yale and I think he was—he's an anarchist and was very active in a lot of stuff in the early 2000s, and basically got shoved out in a similar fashion, where there's lots of support from the department, but because of the hierarchy—and also, there's turf battles within the discipline itself. If people wanted a Marxist sociologist, the institution itself didn't. Right? Even if her colleagues were able to live with it. There's a kind of gatekeeping process that's underway.

You've also mentioned there's somebody who's sprinkling money around that brings in the notorious Michel Foucault at the height of his glory. That's good, but only for a week. We don't want more of that kind of turmoil.

Arney: That was a great rumor that circulated around Foucault's arrival that he was supposed to give three seminars. His seminars filled the auditorium. That's how he did it in France. The rumor that circulated that if you were not a gay guy, you would not be admitted to the seminar. [laughing] That's what happened around Dartmouth. That's the kind of thing that happened there.

Steinhoff: Exactly. That must have been a disappointment, Bill, having your tenure application denied at that level.

Arney: Yeah, but I didn't know enough to know how disappointing it should have been. [laughter] I figure, well, I've got another year. I'll apply for jobs like I did before.

Steinhoff: Tell me about that process.

Arney: I don't remember very much about it. I know I went on a few job interviews here and there, but Evergreen picked me up.

Steinhoff: That would have been 1980, 1981?

Arney: ’81. It was in the MPA program. David Paulsen, who was married to Barbara Smith, was another applicant, so Barbara was not involved in my hiring. I got the job over David, and then he got another job later on. That was in the MPA program.

Steinhoff: That’s right, and you were hired to teach statistics. Is that right?

Arney: Right. Then when they hired me, I didn’t teach statistics for a year.

Steinhoff: I would be very interested to hear about your first encounter with Evergreen, your first impressions—job interview, campus visit, whatever that process was—what sticks with you from that threshold, coming to Olympia?

Arney: What sticks with me? Not a lot. I remember I gave a talk on statistics as a language. I had written a paper for some journal or another. I gave that talk as my talk to the students. A funny end to that was at my first son’s wedding, about four years ago now, some person came out of the crowd and said, “Oh, Bill Arney. I was a student, and we just loved your talk. We just got them to take you.” Apparently, there was some resistance to my appointment, but the students overwhelmed them. That’s the only thing I know about my appointment here.

Steinhoff: You get the gig. You’re moving now from New Hampshire to Olympia. Did people know what Evergreen was, others in your milieu, people that, as you were heading out here, what was your own sense of what the school was?

Arney: I knew about it because I worked at NCHEMS, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Everybody there knew about Evergreen. It was one of those things going on, so I knew about Evergreen. The prospect was good, and I needed a job.

Steinhoff: You’d already experienced the seminar model from Professor Weir at Colorado.

Arney: Yeah.

Steinhoff: And the honors model of pass/no pass, so that piece of scholarly culture was really deeply embedded for you.

Arney: Right.

Steinhoff: Now you’re teaching at Evergreen. What was that transition like from Dartmouth to Evergreen? I’m assuming even with MPA there was the team-teaching model. I’m curious to hear, maybe to get us started with the Evergreen time.

Arney: I didn’t teach in the MPA program in the first year.

Steinhoff: Oh, you mentioned that. What did you do that first year?

Arney: It was called Health and Human Behavior, I think. I’ve got the list. Barbara called me, and I think I said—maybe not said, I said it recently to somebody—she said, “What would you like to teach?” I had

the catalog, and there was something about . . . I forget the title now, but long story short, it was about women returning to college later in life. It was something about reinventing. I don't know what it was. Barbara said, "Well, no, not that one. How about, with this stuff you've done on health, Health and Human Behavior?" I said, "Fine."

It was great. That was a terrific team to be on.

Steinhoff: Remind me. Burt Guttman?

Arney: Yeah, Burt Guttman, Jim Goulden, who was an architect, and Barbara Cooley, who was a nurse, and me. It was a classic team-taught, collaborative blah blah blah. Just a good Evergreen program.

Steinhoff: But that was your first. Now, in retrospect, you can call it a classic. Did it feel like, oh, now this is my milieu?

Arney: Oh, yeah. I felt completely at home. I don't know what you've got in mind as an alternative. I can imagine that somebody might come here and say, "I want to be a professor of biology and I don't want to deal with these sociologists or architects. Architects on a team on health?" And human behavior.

No, I felt entirely at home, and entirely at ease going and doing biology labs with Burt and all that kind of stuff. It was a very simple way to come into the college for me.

Steinhoff: Because Burt had experience, and I'm not familiar with Jim Goulden or Barbara Cooley.

Arney: They'd been around for a few years.

Steinhoff: Got it, so you were the new kid. They knew what they were doing, relatively speaking.

Arney: Relatively speaking. [laughing]

Steinhoff: Were there things that stood out for you about the students? I'm still curious about that coming from one institutional culture to another, from Dartmouth to Evergreen. Evergreen didn't put a premium—doesn't put a premium—on scholarship, so your fancy University of Chicago press bibliography may or may not have signified to people, but certainly—

Arney: It meant nothing. [laughing] Which was fine with me. It's not a matter of resting on your laurels, I don't even care if I have them. I didn't read too many reviews of—there were reviews of the books, but I didn't read too many of them.

I don't know, I think I'm quite naïve even still. Some of this talk around the school now, I can't follow it. I just literally cannot follow it. I don't know what it's about. I don't know what the problems are.

Steinhoff: It's possible that there's—maybe this is not the appropriate metaphor, but there might be a transition from midwifery to obstetrics.

Arney: That's for sure. The college is undergoing a kind of standard institutional transmogrification, if you want to say that. When you can't believe in what you're doing, do something that everybody believes in, or can be made to believe in. Do you know the term "plastic words"?

Steinhoff: Yes.

Arney: From Uwe Poerksen?

Steinhoff: Yes.

Arney: He was a feature in the [Ivan] Illich group. I think he's still alive. I've seen him a few times in Germany. He's just a charming elf. [laughter] He's an elf.

Steinhoff: Beautiful. One thing that's coming to mind, actually, since we've just touched on institutional transformation that we're witnessing. I first started teaching in 2013. First came to Evergreen in 2012. When you started in 1981, the place would have been 10 years old.

One thing that, I think, did signify—if your Chicago books didn't mean much, from what I've been gathering from these oral histories—is, were you here at the beginning? Or were you here during the founding year? When did you arrive?

Arney: Yeah. [laughing]

Steinhoff: I'm just curious whether that was something you were aware of?

Arney: Well, yes, but it wasn't a big deal. The only anecdote I have—and it's only that—is that in one of the meetings talking about the MPA program and what I was going to be doing in that, Duke Kuehn looked over at me and said, "You're going to have to get used to being a junior faculty." I think I probably said something unkind at that point, like, "I didn't realize."

I had never really felt anything about my rank at Dartmouth. For better or for use, it is an old boys' club, even with these other gendered types around. It's like if you're in, you're in. That, for me, has always been the notion of a college. I knew enough to know that a college is something that gathers around the dinner table. And your task is to—with really sharp humor—put other people in their place in a way that they don't know what's happening, but everybody else around the table knows. You've got to be really good, and Duke's comment was not a good one. It wasn't one that I could laugh at.

Steinhoff: No, and it reveals—part of the story, the "four noes"—no rank, if that's part of the story, we can see how that's a myth, that there's a real story.

Arney: That's basically what I told him. "I thought there were no ranks here." We got along after that, but it's obviously stuck with me as a kind of emblem of something or other.

Steinhoff: Absolutely. You were being checked. You were being checked by a person who perceived themselves to have authority.

Arney: Yeah.

Steinhoff: What you were describing earlier about your own indifference or naivete to rank, and then your reflection just now about the old boy character of your experience with Dartmouth, you mentioned a college as "that which happens around a table."

Arney: Around the dinner table, yeah.

Steinhoff: You said dinner table, and that makes me think of, still, that formative seminar at University of Colorado in that Honors College, where you actually were in the professor's house.

Arney: At dinnertime.

Steinhoff: At dinnertime, yeah.

Arney: Oh, yeah. I recognize a lot of the stuff that I just absorbed. It just comes out when I get rankled about things. "Oh, I see what I'm doing." [laughing] If I'm lucky, I say that.

Steinhoff: Well, Bill, I think we've accomplished our goal. It's 2:00 and where we can start next time, I think, would be MPA. We can get MP[A?] out of the way.

Arney: Year two?

Steinhoff: Exactly. You're 31 if it's '81. Right?

Arney: Yeah.

Steinhoff: We'll be able to hear about MPA, hear about everything else, or at least get started on everything else. You did mention Ilich's name, and I think we definitely need to start pulling some of that in. Maybe we could end with Ivan Illich. I'm just reminding us both about that. We've got good stuff on Foucault, we've got good stuff on Meadows, and multiple others.

Arney: I'm just starting to do my class for next quarter on Illich, so it's a good time to—when do you want to do this?

Steinhoff: I'm going to hit pause on this. Maybe even stop. How about that?

[End part 2 of 2 of Bill Arney on November 22, 2020]