Sally Cloninger

Interviewed by Barbara Smith

The Evergreen State College oral history project

March 6, 2018

FINAL

Smith: This is an interview with Sally Cloninger on March 6, 2018. Barbara Smith is doing the interview. Here we go. And there is a DVD that goes with this interview that was her five-year final evaluation.

Where would you like to start? Do you want to start by talking about early, early roots and childhood?

Cloninger: No. I want to start [with] why I came to Evergreen.

Smith: Okay, that would be just fine. Why did you come?

Cloninger: It touches a little on my past. I've told this story to many other faculty. I did my graduate work at Ohio State. I think I was studying for my orals for my doctorate and I went to this behavioral and social science library. I was bored studying, and I looked around and there was a college catalog section, and there was the first Evergreen catalog.

Smith: You're kidding! [laughing]

Cloninger: No, I'm not kidding. And it just like jumped out at me. And it hardly had anything except all of the principles. I was already really interested in interdisciplinary studies, and in my doctorate—it was in film and communications but I had a big section on visual sociology, and I really always thought that when I moved into media that it is fundamentally interdisciplinary. And I thought, this is a great thing.

Up until this point, and since then, I've never stolen anything, never shoplifted or anything. But I stole this catalog out of the Ohio State Library [laughter] and I kept it with me. I looked this morning. I know it's somewhere in my studio here but I can't find it. Clearly, it was like a little beacon.

And then I had a job. I went to Temple University. I was teaching. I was the first female assistant professor hired in that big documentary/radio/television/film department. I took a leave very early in my career and I checked out Evergreen. I met Maxine Mimms. I somehow, of course, met all the people that I needed to meet—Marilyn [Frasca] and LLyn [De Danaan] and Maxine—and Maxine hired me to teach a four-week Super-8 film workshop for Mary Hillaire. I actually succeeded someone on doing it. [laughing]

Smith: When was this?

Cloninger: This was in 1975. I put in an application. I had a very good job for a woman starting out in film, university level and so forth. Rudy Martin interviewed me. I did the whole application and they offered me the job, and I said, "No." [laughter] I said, "I couldn't possibly do that." I really wasn't ready to do this, and I had promised Temple that I would come back. But I wasn't ready to do this. Then I returned to Temple University, and very soon after that, I became the head of the MFA program. I was young to do that, maybe 28, something like that.

Life was interesting in Philadelphia, but I didn't forget about Evergreen or the people I had met. I was sitting in my office in June of 1977, I guess, and I got a phone call. I think it was Will Humphreys [who] said, "You're a finalist in the film hire." I said, "Well, that's ridiculous. I didn't apply for the job." He said, "Well, you're in the finalists. You're a finalist." So obviously, they picked my portfolio from 1975 and saved it, and somebody put it in. I said, "Oh my god."

They flew me out and I wore a very inappropriate outfit to my interview. I remember it was a white suit with a black shirt. [laughter]

Smith: Well, they knew what they were getting!

Cloninger: They knew. And I came and I interviewed, and I actually saw some of the people I had known. Then I left and I didn't know what was going to happen. Then I got a call and I got the job. I said, "Well, I cannot take this job right now. I'm the head of the MFA program. It's now nearly July. I can't walk away from this this September." He said, "Well, if we held the job for you for a year, would you take it?" I said, "Of course"—thinking in the back of my mind, well, I don't really have to. What's going to happen to me?

Anyhow it suddenly became really clear. I mean, I felt I was fated to be here, and I arrived. Now, when I arrived, I was very lucky because I knew some people—very important mentors, LLyn and Marilyn and Maxine—and I met Barbara Leigh Smith, who was very green herself. She had just arrived just a few months before me. I was very thrilled to meet her, and I think she was thrilled to meet me because I would do all these crazy things that she wanted and she'd do things. You know what I mean? So I had a very good start. I really learned a lot.

One of the things that Marilyn taught me—and we were not partners at this point, of course—she just taught me in the very beginning that you had to be able to say no, whether it's to students—if you've got 80 people interviewing for your first film class, which I did have, you have to be able to say no—and if someone in administration makes a comment, you have to be able to say no. I learned that

right away, and I know that's been very hard for maybe 20 years after that for the young people coming at the age—because I was 30 when I arrived. I mean, you could tell people, but they don't necessarily believe you. So I was lucky that I had a really good start, and I had a lot of great mentors.

So that's how I came to Evergreen. Now, I must say, I kept my university connections. In the beginning years I was very active in the National Film Association, I was an officer. I applied for a Fulbright; I got it. Barbara Smith was shocked that I got a Fulbright at 31 [laughter] to Malaysia, and I'll talk a little bit about that in a bit. And I thought, you know, this is just sort of a step on to something else probably, because I'm really learning a lot and I love the place. But then I really fell in love with a lot of stuff in Olympia and I stayed. I stayed the whole career, and I've never regretted it. On my DVD, I talk a lot about that. It really was extraordinarily important for me.

Barbara's going to ask me a question eventually about moving into retirement, but I want to preface that question. I knew I a good teacher, and I was a good administrator, and I was a researcher, and I had made films. But it took me to be at Evergreen for about four, five years before I realized that I actually was a filmmaker, and that's what I've been ever since. I've been a teacher, but I also have become an experimental media artist. And the context of being in this institution let me discover, I think, something that I really am, not just the things that I should be. I'm very grateful for that.

Smith: It seems to me like there's more selves there than you're describing, because you also are a very capable community builder, administrator. There was no film program at all till you came.

Cloninger: There were some people that allegedly . . .

Smith: Staff were running the show, same as [the computer program].

Cloninger: Remember? This was the funniest—I mean, this was my very first quarter, and all of the equipment—there were some advanced male students that had all the equipment. They had all the 16mm equipment. They had it over in a room in the Communications Building, with Gordon Beck's—may he rest in peace—approval, and they would only let certain people use it.

Smith: That's right. [laughing]

Cloninger: And there was a little issue. Here I am, the first woman to teach media, and I said, "This is not right. This is not good." They demanded a meeting and Barbara came. I had to go and—

Smith: That's because I was the Space Dean then.

Cloninger: That's right, and so it was a conflict. They were going to have this intervention with me. I walked into this room and it was packed. Do you remember?

Smith: Yes. [laughing]

Cloninger: And they had cameras on me, and I said, "I'm not signing a release form. You turn those cameras off right now." And they did. So I started off beautifully belligerent. [laughter] But we managed. I don't even know how it happened, but we managed. I guess that the rationality ruled the day, and we moved the equipment to media loan, and developed a whole new way. Of course, with a female faculty, women started to study film here.

My connection to Barbara, from her being the Space Budget Dean to Curriculum Dean to Provost, has been one really important thread. And you're going to get bored hearing her name through this whole interview, but it's very great that she's doing the interview because she really was so important in many of the decisions I made. So right away, I said to her, "Well, there's so many people that want to do film, we have to hire." And try to do that in today's climate! She said, "Okay."

So we slowly found money to do visitors, but we never really had a firm commitment to the curriculum till the late '80s when we made two hires—that was Laurie Meeker and Anne Fischel —that were advertised as having expertise in the politics of representation, feminism, multicultural studies. They were hiring to do that. It was not just to teach film. That is probably the most unique film position advertisement at that time in higher ed. And that made a big difference, because there was a mindset there.

Smith: Yes. It kept it interdisciplinary, too, in a way that I think lots of technical fields aren't.

Cloninger: Right. The other thing, I am a good collaborator, I know that, and I really appreciated the staff from the beginning. There has always been this Evergreen sort of ethic that we're all equal, and you need to be egalitarian with the staff. I lived it and believed it. I collaborated with them and I consulted with them, and they made my work so much better.

Smith: They loved you, too.

Cloninger: I loved them. Of course, there were moments, but I was really lucky that I had a staff like that, because a lot of the areas needed more staff and they didn't. Because of the Library structure with media services and media loan inside of the Library, which is a brilliant thing that someone else thought of before I arrived. That was good, and that allowed me to work with a lot of other staff in different areas.

In fact, again this first year—a very important thing that still resonates for women that were on this—was the wild water women raft trip. There is a video of that on the Visual History archive

collection online apparently, I think—I hope—at The Evergreen State College. We knew that we needed to do things as a community, but also women faculty and staff needed to do it. The place, of course, was founded by men. Men dominated the conversation. That's changed, but it took a long time. A lot of women, including me—and I'm not very easily intimidated—were intimidated in large meetings. I finally broke through having an argument with Kirk Thompson in front of everyone. But it was hard. We did a lot of things to build community, and build a network. It was very important for all the women that participated in that.

Smith: Yeah. And great staff-faculty.

Cloninger: That's right.

Smith: Remember the Rogue River? Rita Cooper, who was the Director of Personnel, was there, and a whole bunch of people.

Cloninger: So that you had allies at all levels. And we felt like we were in it together, and I think for many reasons, that has slipped away.

Smith: Yeah, I don't know.

Cloninger: Not in every area, but I think there is much more of a hierarchy.

Smith: That's important.

Cloninger: It is.

Smith: Another person that I think was important to me and you—because I was the Space Budget Dean then—was I got to hire Walter Niemiec to run the Lab Building and Richard Nesbitt to do the Comm Building, which had just opened when you came.

Cloninger: That's right.

Smith: There was a lot of openness about personnel and location.

Cloninger: And people came and were excited, and we discovered things. We were lucky. I suppose there's one golden age of Evergreen, but I really felt—I'm so glad I came in the late '70s and was able to have some space and support to build things. And to learn things.

I took the Five Foci very seriously. I lived by them, and I think that was to my betterment. It made my teaching and my collaboration much better. But one thing, this notion of being a co-learner, I didn't quite understand that right when I got here. Because we're trained in graduate school and you have this hierarchy and whatever. I remember, I was the first convener of the Expressive Arts. I think

that I was so naïve when I got here. And Barbara Smith put in a structure. She felt we need a curricula structure that had some continuity and some pathways. I was so naïve that all the people in the arts elected me. I don't even know if I was in the room. There was a meeting—I'm not kidding—and I came out and I said, "I'm the convener of the Expressive Arts!" [laughing]

Smith: They often elected people who weren't present.

Cloninger: Exactly! I might have been in the room, by anyhow, I had no idea. This was not unheard of. I already had held administrative positions as a young faculty member, so I thought, okay. It was at a point where there was a huge amount of tension around enrollment and retention. So it was clear to me that a structural progression and some kind of way that there's predictability—I embraced it. Not everybody did. In fact, I had many arguments about this. But I got to work and I kind of convinced a lot of people—in the arts, too—to also agree.

But I went away. I had a Fulbright to Malaysia—which was very important to me and I'll probably talk about my global feminist activism later—and I came back and Marilyn Frasca was now the convener of the Expressive Arts, and she had thrown the entire thing out! [laughter] She had this great idea. I told Barbara this story at her home about a year and a half ago, so she didn't even know about it really. Marilyn had this idea that we would all be visiting artists. She and Susan Aurand made their own catalog for the arts. We had our own catalog. There was the Evergreen catalog and then there was this catalog. We all were going to do work and somehow do some work with students, and I was a very late adapter. I said, "I'm not having anything to do with this." And then I realized, okay, just do it. Just do it.

I taught my first class called Experiments in Light and Sound—which is sort of owning my interest in experimental media—and it was that moment that I understood about co-learning. And it was the best thing that could have happened to me because I involved students in my work, I was involved in their work. I learned things from them, and then I really understood that if you can design curriculum that has that feature—I mean, for most, the courage to do it and the support to do it, everything's going to work out just fine.

Smith: You have to have work, too.

Cloninger: You have to have work, but even if you don't have the exact skills —I mean, in the Islands program, taught many years later by Jin Darney and Phil Harding, we didn't have the knowledge base for that. We had a thematic base and we understood curricula design, but we had to be co-learners. In fact, in both cases, the faculty members all did all the assignments. We felt ethically we couldn't even

teach a class like that unless we were willing to put ourselves out. And I think that's somewhat rare that people are willing to do that. It's hard, because you could easily fail. And so can everyone else.

Smith: And just get voiceless, lost.

Cloninger: Yes, but that was good. I think we've finished that part. Now what?

[Recording turned off and on at 00:18:45]

Cloninger: I think I could say a little bit more—oh, I know. Did I already say I became a filmmaker in this interview or did I say it before? I said it in the beginning, so I don't need to say more about that. We'll be taking this out of the transcript. [laughing]

Smith: Right. Where are you in this now?

Cloninger: I don't know.

Smith: Do you think that we covered what Evergreen was like then? And what period are we talking about here, sort of the boundaries?

Cloninger: I joined the faculty in '78 fall and I retired in 2011. Then I did a post-retirement contract for a couple of years. We're talking about the '70s and '80s right now, but it all sort of fits together. Here's something I guess I'd like to talk about. I did co-learners, and the question list talks about my research, community engagement, creative work and that kind of thing.

I mentioned this earlier, but I was very lucky because I think it is hard to be out in a small town—which certainly has gotten larger and more interesting—but a small town in the dank forest, and not have chances to engage with the larger world. I was lucky I had a Fulbright to Malaysia, and that was terrific. And it's so interesting because immediately the administration when they heard that—Byron Youtz was the Provost—he said, "Well, we're going to count that towards one of your years of teaching." Maybe they do that for everyone, but I thought it was just totally matter-of-fact.

Then through Fulbright, where I helped design the National Performing Arts Academy and the National Film Board of Malaysia—"help"—put that in small tiny letters, but that's what I did—I also got involved a little bit with the Asia Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development. That's what happens with these things. Then I was brought back to do some teaching in Bangladesh, training women producers from all over Asia in documentary. Then I worked on a big kit for broadcasters and university students all over the region about gender representation through many, many different cultural lenses. I was the chief producer and editor on that. Then I worked with media literacy. So I had a lot of opportunities to branch out and keep learning.

Smith: And networking.

Cloninger: Many of these things I could never have done if I hadn't been an Evergreen faculty member. Because I was often the only American, the only Caucasian in the room, and I had to work through all this amazing diversity, and figure out how to collaborate and team build and do stuff. And I think that it was sort of a two-way street.

I want to come back to the opportunity the college availed to me was that often these invitations would come in the middle of a teaching year, and I would go tell the Provost or the Curriculum Dean—probably Barbara Smith—and she would say, or they would say, "That's a great idea. How will you cover your class? Go ahead." And I'd go away for five weeks to Bangladesh. Because she said to me, or he said to me, I'm not sure who—there were other people who permitted me to do these things—"This is going to enhance your teaching."

Now, I think that in those days, maybe things were easier or freer, but I also think that faculty sometimes had a little trouble asking for that, and understanding that you could convince someone instead of they just sort of disappear for a month. [laughing] You can do that in this curriculum because it's so fluid.

Smith: Well, it's not just that though. It's because there were teams, so there was a way to cover the teaching.

Cloninger: Exactly, if you had the idea to do it. But still, I have to say Evergreen really supported me, both in my media activism and research and my own production.

Smith: It's funny because at some schools, the national activities and rep take over the person's emotional life and intellectual life, and the teaching dissolves behind them. And here, we never had that happen. All the people that I worked with that did things like you did, it enriched their teaching, and there weren't people that were trying to kind of find a life elsewhere.

Cloninger: Right. But I gave up all the paper-writing and domestic national media organizations in exchange for a more global perspective, which had different expectations and different opportunities.

Smith: But that for us, I think, was even more attractive because it made us more international and made the whole curriculum stronger.

Cloninger: Right. That was good. I think that I was able to keep a really open relationship to lots of different areas and learn new things. And I really always believed in Evergreen, and there was never a point where I didn't want to keep working. I do think ones gets tired.

Smith: It's pretty exhausting with no boundaries. [laughing]

Cloninger: Yes, it is. I think that towards the end of my teaching career—I kept a little book and I would put, when are you going to retire? This is a question that everybody at Evergreen, when they hit somewhere in the sixties, or even sooner some of them. And what was I going to do?

One of the questions on here was, were there any disappointments? One of the things that I was going to do with colleagues was develop a MFA program and introduce media arts. I had a lot of institutional support for this. It was risky, but it was really a very positive thing, and it would have kept me moving in a different direction and growing in a different direction. I really wanted to do it and I felt I could. I had really a lot of experience. And it would be sort of a nice cap to come back and, in my opinion, do it correctly—no offense to Temple University. [laughter] It was a struggle to get the budget approved, and then, like anything else at Evergreen, nothing is permanent. The legacies are hard to hold on to.

And there really wasn't support. There was a new Provost who, fortunately—I mean, he was a terrible Provost. I'm not going to mention his name, and he was removed. But he had no interest in this. And even an internal Provost, who was an interim, had some interest but not really the energy to do it. That's one of the few disappointments—not a major one because perhaps it was good that I could move . . .

One thing I did stay for was the development of the CCAM [Center for Creative and Applied Media], the new HD multi-camera studio and experimental media lab. I think that I had some impact because I could teach there to get that done. But after that was done, it was time to retire.

Smith: I think Evergreen is ambivalent about graduate programs—less now than it used to be, but for years was ambivalent about it. It was partly because it was hard to keep people in areas to keep the program going.

Cloninger: Right. And I was ambivalent about them. I was a critic at times, and we designed something that we thought would solve this problem. Because the graduate students were going to have to interact in other programs with other faculty across the discipline, and at that time, our progression of classes would have to be continued in order to support that. So we felt the moving image group, which was a group that staff and myself formed early on, realizing—as a special interest group with issues about equipment and facilities—we needed another little place to support each other and to basically share resources. So that happened also before we grew the area, and that was important, too, for the staff. I think that committee still exists to this day.

Smith: There's currently three kind of competing MFA ideas. One is yours; the other is a creative writing one, which was just put forward; the other is an MFA in indigenous arts through the Longhouse. There's resistance to all of them because of this issue of budget, faculty lines, continuity, capability. The graduate programs have been very up and down in terms of enrollment.

Cloninger: I think it's a gamble. The media one is gone, I think. But there has to be a base of faculty that are already—I mean, the indigenous arts one is a wonderful idea. They have a beautiful facility and there's tremendous interest in it, I think probably nationally. But I don't see there's a lot of faculty currently that are committed to it.

Smith: No.

Cloninger: Which is strange, to me.

Smith: They've almost all retired without being replaced with just one—

Cloninger: But you don't necessarily have to be a First Person or a Native to be interested in indigenous arts.

Smith: That's right.

Cloninger: So you could support it. Certainly you'd have to make hires.

Smith: Right.

Cloninger: But it has been an issue for Evergreen. The undergraduate mission is, I think, the most important one. Hopefully that will continue.

Smith: Yes. Were there particular times that you saw lots of change that made a difference, positive or negative? You were there for a long time.

Cloninger: I'm looking at my notes here, but I think that there was a few key points that were complex. We had a number of DTFs on strategic planning, and curriculum design especially was one that I was involved with. And out of that came a more robust coordinated positions for—I don't know what we called them.

Smith: Planning Units.

Cloninger: Planning Units. That's right, the PUCs.

Smith: They keep changing names.

Cloninger: And I was the first PUC [Planning Unit Coordinator] actually for the Expressive Arts, so I actually served the Expressive Arts in some leadership probably for nearly almost half of my teaching

career. And I think the scale of the college—the growth issues—have been problematic at times in terms of too many students and not enough curriculum and not enough leadership.

Smith: And not enough students either!

Cloninger: Not enough students. We come back to that. But that was interesting. Evergreen has always had this that everything is spirited volunteerism, but there is a point where it was great that the PUCs received a one quarter release, sort of taken out of the attrition numbers in the spring quarter, so they could devote their time to more curricula development and building a curriculum that had some rationale and across-the-campus offerings.

I think that was very important, and when that went—and there's many things that went, and I would say this is not a popular part of the interview, but I understand the union issue, and I understand why, at the time, there was a lot of disappointment with the current Provost then, a lot of disappointment with the administration. A lot of people had had a lot of problems with, you know, just that Evergreen paid low and things like that. But after the union, many of these, A, areas where people might volunteer or just good-naturedly jump in and do things; B, not be counting how many hours they work. I want to be articulate about this, but I think there was sort of the notion of governance and how much you participate in that, and why you have to, a lot of that got swept away. And I don't believe that the people that were championing the union had this idea this would happen, and perhaps some of them still wouldn't see this. But I do think that the timing for that, and probably the basic makeup, sort of institutional personality—

Smith: The turnover.

Cloninger: The turnover, the people's experience as faculty, things really changed then. And I think it's easy to get rid of planning areas, or change them, or just have less continuity or—I mean, I don't know. I sound like a cranky old retiree, but I think that it would have been impossible to stop that as an equity movement. But I think it was not well thought out, and I think that in many ways—partly the academic administration—the deans did not know how to engage with this and help the faculty make this transition. And I think that, again, there was not a strong Provost.

Smith: Talk a little bit more about the role of being a Planning Unit Convener [Coordinator]. From my point of view, you and the scientific inquiry PUC in particular seemed the most capable of being a leader over an area and in an institution that was ambivalent about committing to anything. But you were effective, I thought, and everybody I've talked to about what happened, they said, "Well, it just became

boring." They'd go to meetings and they'd write in your name on a list, and that was all there was. And that isn't all there was.

Cloninger: No, but it became difficult to get people to go to meetings. They had other commitments. I don't know, I think some of us like structure more than others, and I'm one, I must say.

Smith: That's true. Me, too! [laughing]

Cloninger: And I think for the students' sake, you need some continuity. The classes don't have to be all called the same thing. They certainly don't have to be the same. But there's also this issue with if you were in a Planning Unit and you had some kind of a pathway, it would be difficult on the members of that unit to also fulfill all the other things they needed to do. And there has to be a tradeoff. I've always thought there may be better people to teach first-year program, there are better people to teach pathways, there are better people to do advanced work. But there became this idea that everybody had to do the same thing. There was a sense that you could always petition, but it was a hassle, rather than "Okay, that's great. What a wonderful idea."

I know I annoyed people in Expressive Arts in terms of some of the things that I did and said and pushed for, but I also took it very seriously. I'd interviewed all of them several times, I talked to them separately. I knew I wasn't a department chair, but I kind of acted in some ways that they had someone that knew what they were doing. I think I might have even visited their classes, some of them.

Smith: Wow.

Cloninger: I put in the extra time to do that because I knew—I thought—that was the way you should do it. Now, I'd never been a department chair, but I didn't think of it as a department. I have to say, however, my teaching career at Evergreen—I was thinking about this this morning—I really did not do as much as team teaching as a lot of my colleagues because I was committed to this pathway. And I also—it's amazing, this will shock some people 150 years from now—no! [laughing]—in my career, I believed that I only taught with two male colleagues. I taught all with female colleagues, or alone. There might have been three, and I can't quite remember, but I certainly collaborated. But I have to say that was an interesting choice, or the admission of that, because we choose our colleagues or they choose us because of some kind of . . .

Smith: . . . simpatico.

Cloninger: . . . simpatico, some kind of complementary spirit, who our friends are. There's all sorts of ways.

Smith: But some of it was because that was the demography of the area you were in.

Cloninger: Well, that's true.

Smith: Of course, that in itself was [laughter] part of the explanation.

Cloninger: Yeah, there got to be a point where, did we ever hire a male faculty in media? So far not, but hopefully they may soon.

I would say, for my love of the interdisciplinary study and the Five Foci, in my career I was a very good colleague and a good team member, but I was not as interdisciplinary. I didn't take as many risks. Well, we might not call them risks. I had a greater commitment to almost training people in media literacy, media activism, filmmaking. I really felt that these students could make a difference, so I would go in that direction more than teach with someone in chemistry. I wouldn't say it's either my or the institution's fault, but it's a fact of life. And that was the good thing at Evergreen at that time; you could make those decisions.

Smith: Yeah. The word interdisciplinary to me has always perplexed me. Because I thought you were very interdisciplinary because of your Visual Anthropology course in particular. Because you always had content. It wasn't just a technical course, which it often is.

Cloninger: No, no. I agree. I was teaching aesthetics and art history, theater history and performance. Coming back to my very first thing, that's why I was drawn here. The media or whatever, it is fundamentally a tool to explore the interdisciplinarity of the world around us.

Smith: Exactly. That was a theme from the beginning of me being there, about what's interdisciplinary? It was often seen by the scientists as a humanities faculty criticizing them, and then vice-versa. Because both of their fields are very interdisciplinary, or can be, and thinking that you have to tie Shakespeare to chemistry seems phony to me.

Cloninger: Right.

Smith: And sort of an illegitimate stereotyping of each other.

Cloninger: Do you think at the beginning of the college—I wasn't there—in those cases, people were placed in big teams, and they had to sink or swim? And there were these decisions made, because this was an experiment and they were trying things.

Smith: That's right.

Cloninger: So they'd throw these people together, and that became, for some faculty—I mean, people stay at Evergreen. They found the college and then they stay their whole career.

Smith: They stay at most colleges, actually.

Cloninger: At this point maybe. But they stay, and they have this memory and that's how it's done.

Smith: But that isn't how it's done at all now. In fact, only half are team teaching even. But in the beginning, yeah, there was 1,000 students, there was 10 programs, they each had five faculty and it was kind of randomly placed.

Cloninger: Yeah, it must have been agonizing! [laughter] And exciting. There's something that I wanted to mention. I think I learned a lot more about learning communities from you when you asked me to do that learning community production, that multimedia production.

Smith: Yeah, that was fun.

Cloninger: Because I didn't really know the roots of it. It was sort of like there was everything else, and then there was Evergreen. I didn't know about this huge history. And I have to say—we've talked about this before—one thing I feel very glad about that I knew I had skills—I could make images, I could do sound, I could do stuff—and I tried to lend them to community building or whatever, often prodded by you, but sometimes also by myself. I was willing to do that. I think it would be great if more people were willing to do that. Because you could make many things if you were in the arts or other areas, but it's nice if you bring it to bear to help the institution that you're in that really needs that, too.

Smith: Yeah, and it feeds you, I think.

Cloninger: Yes, of course.

Smith: If you're a community builder, part of the food that you get back is about the enjoyment, the fun, the sociability.

Cloninger: I said earlier that when I came to Evergreen, in a few years I realized I really was a filmmaker. But I did a lot of work that was not about me building a reputation in filmmaking in the world. That wasn't that important to me. And it was like I really was very interested in teaching and training. I remember a production with an alum. It was called "Mind Over Matter: Dr. Barbato Explains the '80s." It was at On the Boards in Seattle. It was one selected to be in this Northwest Performance Festival.

I was teaching performance art with Doranne Crable and Terry Setter at the time, so we used some students from that. But I co-wrote and directed this. We did it in Seattle and it had a lot of media in it, and it was kind of hilarious. I worked with Patti Dobrowolski a very successful alum. And at the end of it, there was someone from New York that wanted us to take it to New York. And I said—to the

horror of my collaborator—"I don't want to do that. I want to go back to Bangladesh and work with women."

So I was always in conflict with that and the other things I wanted to do. In a way, I'm very lucky, but I also—this comes to the question . . .

Smith: You're back to the "learn to say no," part two.

Cloninger: Yes.

Smith: But I think a very talented person like yourself has to know that. Because otherwise you're like a boat with no rudder, and completely exhausted.

Cloninger: Right. But what I want to say is that when I got close to retirement, I said I was a filmmaker and I've done a wide variety of things. Right? But I never was only a filmmaker. And then, when I got very close to retirement, I was writing in a journal and I said, "I don't even know if I really am a filmmaker." Because I don't think I had made films for a couple of years. The last big film I made was a film about an alum, Cappy Thompson, called "Dreaming of Spirit Animals." So I said, "I don't even know if I'm a filmmaker."

So I said, well, give it like two years after you retire. You'll figure it out. And it took a while to. I think I'm very lucky. We were talking about this at lunch, how if you have something you can do, and you're very lucky if you want to keep doing it. But it wasn't immediate, like what do you do after Evergreen? You have this circus, and this unbelievable collaborative and social context. And one of the great things about Evergreen is that whoever you're teaching with and working with, you're in love with them, you're with them all the time, it's fabulous. And then when the class is over, you hardly ever see them again. And then you have a new one and you have all these kind of—

Smith: Right.

Cloninger: But you're in a little bubble and it's just so intense, and then you don't have that. And then what will you do?

Smith: I think that was the biggest adjustment for me, the social stuff, and missing that.

Cloninger: Yes, and we will never have that again. It just was special. We're lucky. And I think today, the people working there today, I'm sure, have the same feeling. I know Evergreen is under some difficult times, but I think that that spirit in a learning community in the class, it feeds people.

Smith: Right.

Cloninger: But I got to the point, what was I going to do? Then I realized, what else am I going to do?

Smith: Yes!

Cloninger: I have these skills, and I've really never been able to work fast—I mean, it would take me five years to finish a film. Now, since I retired, I think I've made two major films and maybe eight short films.

Smith: Wow. That's a lot.

Cloninger: And I'm not particularly interested in the whole promotion and festival. It's not that important to me. I think it's important to have your work seen, but I didn't do that for 35 years, so it's a little hard to make that an important part of my life. But making images and telling stories and collecting material about things that are still important to me are pretty much the same.

Smith: What about the gap that's about being with other people? There's the doing the films and all that. That's kind of a solo activity, isn't it?

Cloninger: Well, the way I make films, it's almost all solo, until you show it. Luckily I have friends all around the world, but I, you know, it's just a different life. You will never have that—I mean, I could join a theater group and run away with them or something.

Smith: You did that for a while.

Cloninger: Yes, I did. [laughter] I had performative skills, which I also brought to bear on my teaching. But I think it's a very unique thing, this team-taught collaborative idea, and I hope it can survive. It's so important.

Smith: And the invention process.

Cloninger: Yes.

Smith: I think that's why people are so obsessive about those things, because they have intrinsic real value.

Cloninger: Right.

Smith: But there's something lost, too, when you're just reinventing everything all the time, and letting go of precious, hard-won solutions.

Cloninger: Right. Speaking about invention, it reminds me of program planning. I taught twice with Virginia Darney, who was also a dean, and she's going to be interviewed for this project.

Smith: She was a great dean.

Cloninger: Yes, she was a very good dean. And we really enjoyed the planning process. [laughter] We would plan for a year. Now we hear about people want to be—you know, there's been this issue of

monetizing the planning area; you're paid to do your curriculum. I mean, curriculum planning-that's the wonderful thing.

Smith: That was food! [laughing]

Cloninger: You got to anticipate. It's like the journey begins when you start planning, or you start thinking about the trip you're going to take. So we would plan, and I don't know, I guess the sense from the faculty that I'm still in contact with that people don't quite have that fire or that interest in that, or it's different. It's more like a job, and it wasn't a job if you were planning.

We actually taught together three times. We taught Islands, Museums and Hollywood, which I swore I would never teach, except she convinced me to teach a class on Hollywood. But it was great. So that's why it was so much fun. It really was fun. It was hard—we worked very hard—but it was fun.

But I think that in many ways, my more political work was outside of the college. I certainly was very concerned about gender equity and racism and multicultural studies and all that stuff, and was a participant in many of those areas. But that work was more outside of Evergreen. Inside of Evergreen was more curriculum development. And, I think, in my teaching—certainly the way I taught—was very political. It's interesting, I haven't thought of that before, but to see my career, it was very integrated moving forward of one block of interests, but certain things were able to happen in a global setting that couldn't happen maybe inside America, too, in American higher ed. It's interesting.

Smith: So were there missed pathways that you have any regrets about? Missed opportunities?

Cloninger: No. [laughing] I don't!

Smith: That's how I feel, too.

Cloninger: I really don't.

Smith: That's good.

Cloninger: I think I was disappointed a couple of times that things weren't followed through with. I, with Peter Randlette and other faculty and staff, had two major Fund for Innovation grants, and we laugh about it. The first one was called Media Space, and we invented a way to show moving images online, and you could write comments on it. Now, if we had been smart, we could have developed YouTube, you know? [laughter] It was preceding YouTube! That was great.

And then the other one was a Visual History Archive project. On record, I'm going to say I think the college really dropped the ball with that. There's hundreds of hours of video, film, interviews. Maya Angelou speaking, Lynda Barry doing this marvelous thing, it explores every aspect of teaching-

learning communities, you know, teaching across significant differences—all that stuff. And now it seems to be just you leave an institution, like an Evergreen, I think, in some ways—and the structure isn't there to . . .

Smith: . . . maintain it.

Cloninger: Or to even remember it, or to have a feeling, this might be useful. I'm very glad that this project is happening, but in a sense, this project really could have led off from the Visual History Archive because there's so much material there. Most of the people that you're interviewing, we had video of them. It's on servers somewhere (hopefully) but not online.

Smith: How many people were interviewed, and how did you pick them?

Cloninger: We didn't pick them. We were collecting and digitizing material that was already there. We were trying to preserve it. You know, like VHS tapes. Remember, there was a seminar of women at Evergreen early on in the TV studio, so we digitized that and got that. There's the early half-inch videotapes of the founding fathers talking.

Smith: And all the Mary Hillaire stuff.

Cloninger: All the Mary Hillaire stuff—not all—but some of that. And cassette tapes. Our issue was that whatever we need, it's right here, and we just have to—and nobody has access to it.

Smith: We can make that a platform of this project, I think.

Cloninger: I don't even know—I directed this project. It was mainly Peter Randlette and myself, and there were a few other people. But I had a board, and Betsy Diffendal, Marilyn Frasca, LLyn De Danaan, Susan Aurand, Laurie Meeker, Greg Mullins was on it for a bit. I'm trying to think. There was many others. Some of them were retired—they were already emerita—and some of them were not. We had interns, and we ran this project for two years, and it was a huge amount of—and there's a report. You know what I mean?

Smith: [Sighs] So Sam [Schrager] doesn't know about this apparently.

Cloninger: Well, I can't imagine he wouldn't, but it's very possible.

Smith: Okay. That's something I'll follow up on.

Cloninger: I think I might have a copy of the final report. I'll look before you leave.

Smith: That would be great.

Cloninger: But it is true that once one leaves an institution, you can't really—I mean, I had spoken to Greg Mullins about this and other people—I'm going to name names—Amy Greene—but they'd kind of go "Well, whatever." I think Peter knows, but two of the three names I just mentioned are still working there, but it doesn't seem like—

Smith: And Greg runs the Library.

Cloninger: I know. I know.

Smith: I can make something happen with this. I think that would be great.

Cloninger: Yeah, I think it would be good. And I think that this project would be augmented, and would augment that project. Because it's like if you hear an interview with Dan Evans—which I know you've done—and then you get to see them. Or, there's a fabulous piece called First Draft produced by a student, Dominique Sepser, and it has Rudy Martin talking about interdisciplinary teaching in the most marvelous way, and lots of other people.

Smith: Wow. So is there a table of contents?

Cloninger: Well, there was a giant—let me just get to the report. Online—this is a problem, you think the digital world will survive—there was a giant searchable engine. You could type in Barbara Smith and see you.

Smith: Are you positive it isn't there?

Cloninger: I'm positive as of last week, because I tried to find my 32-year evaluation video. That was there, and then I knew it was broken. There was nothing.

Smith: They've had a lot of problems with broken links throughout the college's Web stuff.

Cloninger: It was sort of an auxiliary to the Web thing. Somebody would have to take this on, but it seems to me this grant—a little piece of—and I'm sure that I would be glad, and maybe some others, to help a little bit with this.

Smith: You and Peter maybe again.

Cloninger: Well, I don't know about that. [laughter]

Smith: Okay. That's good.

Cloninger: Yes, that is good.

Smith: That's a treasure trove.

Cloninger: I think so. Do you think I'm done?

Smith: Do you think you're done?

Cloninger: I don't know.

Smith: I think you did amazing coverage here.

Cloninger: I mean, one's never done, but I think that—

Smith: I have to warn you that after I did this, I laid in bed that night to go to sleep and all this stuff came pouring out. "Oh, I didn't do that. I forgot this, I forgot that." I couldn't go to sleep!

Cloninger: That's what I'm concerned. I'm afraid I've forgotten something.

Smith: But you can add stuff when you get the transcript.

Cloninger: So you could add it to the written transcript. I like this question, meeting your partner. I met Marilyn Frasca here.

Smith: Yes, in 1975.

Cloninger: Yes, yes. I have to say, I feel that you established a kind of mentorship, or, I don't know what they were called—buddy system with the new hires? I think it was after I was hired, but there was this feeling of passing things on. You really encouraged that, and we all participated in it. Some people, it's not natural for them to do that, but it really—

Smith: It should be natural at a college that has collaboration as one of the Five Foci.

Cloninger: I know. Well, it sort of makes you wonder.

Smith: It's at war with the reinvention value. I think the reinvention and autonomy, actually, are the two prominent values.

Cloninger: Autonomy is one of the greatest attractions to being a faculty member there, but with that comes all the other opportunities—co-learning, and personal engagement in your work, teaching across many disciplines.

Smith: There's such fear, I think, of—so when I say, "We're too committed to reinvention," then people go "Well, if you can't reinvent, that's where you kill everything." Because that's where actually the Meiklejohn whole thing came about. It was like once you get a department, you get stability, but you get rigidity, and no ability to cross the boundaries in terms of interdisciplinary, or reinvent things, or even look for missing elements. So the combination really is what makes it work. And balance—balance isn't there in all these periods at all.

Cloninger: But I recognize I came late '70s—I told the story at the beginning—I didn't come for anything but the philosophy. I could get a job somewhere else—I had a job—and it was a real change from the East Coast to the Northwest. But I came for that. That's all I wanted to be here for. That's why I came, so that's what I did. And I think everything has changed so much for a lot of my colleagues. Maybe it was they came in part for that, but they had other reasons to come, too.

Smith: I still remember LLyn saying something years and years ago, when she was still Patterson, she said something about "Well, it's one thing to say you're committed to the Five Foci and self-evaluations and all this stuff. A name is one thing; authentically believing in something is a whole different situation." And founders have that philosophical commitment that's in their spirit, and successors have too often just the name. So they're executing a process rather than something that's critically important to them.

Cloninger: Right. And that may have been—I think about myself—one reason I stayed enthusiastic so long is that I was a founder.

Smith: Yes, you were.

Cloninger: I can say I founded the Interdisciplinary Media program, and had great colleagues that . . .

Smith: I think people actually came through—as far as the big class of 1986 or whatever it was, which was 26 people—they all had that founding sort of experience. I don't know anything about later.

Cloninger: Yeah, and I think the challenges are great, from everything from the social media digital technology to economics to our current political climate. I mean, it's not easy. I hope Evergreen weathers some of these things and does transform.

Smith: In some ways it's fantastic opportunities.

Cloninger: Really. I want to return to something, because I want to show you something after we finish the interview, but I want to talk about my first evaluation conference.

Smith: Is that the one I remember? [laughing]

Cloninger: Yes. Barbara was my first dean, so she didn't hardly know what she was doing either. [laughing] So you perhaps were more permissive, at least less intimidating. I've always been someone that, you know, I'll push a boundary—"I don't really want to do it that way." So this whole thing of writing these evaluations, I certainly took it very serious writing students and self-evaluation, but the whole thing with the writing for the first year, I said, "You know, I'm really busy." So I thought, I think

I'm just going to sing my self-evaluation. So I told her. In those days, I think you had to go to the dean's office to have your evaluation conference.

Smith: Or we'd go to your office.

Cloninger: Yeah, I thought that was almost a little aberrant. I told her to meet me in the piano practice room in the Communications Building. I don't know what she thought. She just came over there, and in there was Malcolm Stilson, who wrote all these wonderful, crazy musicals about Evergreen in the early days, and he was a great pianist. And I was there, and I sang my self-evaluation. Now, Barbara turned so red. I mean, we're in a little tiny room. There's a baby grand piano, me belting out this song—[laughter] I can't remember what it was; anyhow, we have a copy of me singing it later—and Barbara. It was wonderful. And, you know, she appreciated it. And I have to say, the best administrators I worked with are people like Barbara, who appreciate things and are willing to say, "Well, that was very amusing." That was fine. I wasn't concerned I wasn't going to get renewed because I didn't write an evaluation.

Smith: That was the most memorable one I ever did, I have to say.

Cloninger: Well, I'm glad to hear that.

Smith: Yes. But I did get a little training in this. I was paired up with Dean Rob Knapp my first year as dean, and he took me to his conferences to learn how to do it. So I got a sense that they were, number one, fun, number two nutritious—because they often had food—and tone was important; that it was developmental and validation mostly. But no one ever sang to me before.

Cloninger: Of course not. [laughter] But that issue of a dean taking another dean to evaluation conferences, I suspect that didn't continue.

Smith: It should.

Cloninger: That was a special thing. We can see many points where Evergreen made decisions for whatever—convenience, exigency, the force of the majority or whatever—but, you know, when we did move to the common law tenure and we moved away from—the workload was too high and the deans didn't observe people teaching. I think the last person that observed me teaching was Michael Beug, and I was doing a lecture. This was like 1989. I was teaching Visual Humor with Sandra Simon, and my lecture that day was on women in comedy and stereotyping—representation—and no one knew—including Mike Beug and Sandra Simon and the class—that I had spent like three and a half hours that

morning getting transformed by the costumer, Ruth Parmalee, into Lucille Ball. And I did the whole thing . . .

Smith: . . . in character?

Cloninger: . . . in character. I did the whole lecture as Lucy. I have a recording of that. And I got the funniest note from Dean Mike Beug. And his secretary was just horrified because he wrote me back and said, "I think it was very rude of you, Sally, that you had a guest lecturer come and do a presentation when I was supposed to be evaluating you." [laughter] And she thought he was serious!

Smith: That's great. That's more humor than I thought he had.

Cloninger: Well, perhaps. You know, I didn't talk about my students actually, and I want to. I did talk about co-learning, but that kept me going. I really had some wonderful experiences with the students. I have to say, I think I was able to move from many different technologies and different sort of conceptual and ideological and practical environments of media development that I could adapt to, so that I was able to be relevant. And I believe my other colleagues are as well.

But I really think that I got more than I gave, although I gave a lot. I think that I really had some wonderful students, and they've succeeded in different ways. Not a lot in big movie awards, but some, but in all sorts of ways. I think that that is also the amazing thing, if you can have a long career without departmental ranking and all this stuff, and reduced class and all that, and you still look forward to coming to work and teach these students. And they get younger and younger and they're still fascinating and interesting. Who could ask for anything but that?

Smith: Did you see much change over time? Marilyn saw a lot of change recently.

Cloninger: Absolutely recently. Although I have to say, the best thing that I got to do at the end of my formal career—and I thought this up myself—was that I shifted into this CCAM, developing the curriculum there. That was a multi-camera production and a high-tech television studio. And I had many more students with difficulties, sometimes disabilities. But the whole thing was about collaboration, and everybody had to put it out. The shyest people would have to perform. Everyone had to act and they had to direct and they had to move cameras. And they also had some learning disabilities, and there was always a research component, but I did a lot of collaborative work with them.

And I think that had I been in classes that I had taught earlier, I think I would have had a much more difficult time. Because I think it had all of the features that people struggle with, but in a way—we had a few issues with very disruptive students at times. But the class, there was so much collaboration,

and you had to depend on people. For example, I assigned a project about visual music, I just handed out some classical DVDs and the teams had to come back in a week and do these sort of Ernie Kovacs things in the studio. And really, everyone had to do it, and they had to take care of each other.

Smith: Wow. So there's no way to cop out.

Cloninger: No, you can't have a whole college curriculum like that.

Smith: No freeloaders.

Cloninger: No! You can't have the whole curriculum be that way, but you've got to have spaces for that.

Smith: That's a great story, actually.

Cloninger: So I see the difference in people, but I didn't experience it because of the way I taught the last few years. I felt a commitment. If I had fought for this facility, I was going to have to fill it.

Smith: And use it.

Cloninger: Yeah, and the staff and I were going to have to learn how to use it because none of us had used anything—some parts of it—that sophisticated in multi-camera. So I was lucky.

Smith: That's great!

Cloninger: Thank you very much, Barbara. I've enjoyed it.

Smith: Thank you very much. This was very rich.

Cloninger: I know I forgot something but . . . [laughing]

Smith: No, it's okay. You can add it in the transcript.

Cloninger: Okay.