

Susan Aurand
Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal
The Evergreen State College oral history project
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FINAL

Fiksdal: It is September 26, 2021, our second interview. I just wanted to pick up where we left off, Susan. One of the things I was thinking is that it sounds like you may have certain phases in your career at Evergreen of teaching art.

Aurand: Yes. In the early years, I taught a combination, or alternately, studio programs with other visual arts faculty or performing arts faculty, and programs with humanities faculty. Those were great experiences.

In the second half of my career, probably the last 15, 20 years, I taught with science faculty, which was an interesting challenge. For example, I taught three times with Dharshi Bopegedera, a chemist. We decided to teach together partly because she was struggling to get out of being locked in to teaching only science. Once the science faculty decided to offer a Bachelor of Science degree, they had a fixed rotation of disciplines that had to be taught. She was at Evergreen, I think, for seven years before she taught with a non-science faculty.

Fiksdal: I thought people were encouraged far before that.

Aurand: No. Some were locked in to area offerings, and she's not the only one. We were pregnant at the same time and there were few women faculty having kids then, so we became friends around that, and decided to teach together.

The theme of the first program we taught was Light. It came out of the fact that her daughter, Alokia's name means light, and my son's name, Lucas, means light. We thought, okay, there's our theme, and we'll make it kid friendly, that is, we will stop activities at 3:00 in the afternoon so we can be home when our kids get home.

Apart from the personal part, it was terrific, because Light is a huge topic, and a topic in chemistry that I didn't know anything about. In chemistry, light is a tool. Basically, you bombard matter with different levels of energy of light to learn what it is by boosting electrons into higher energy states, and then analyzing the radiation that comes out when the substance returns to its ground state. It was a whole different way of thinking about light than how an artist thinks about light. In art it is about value, color, and sight itself.

We had so much fun, and it convinced me that science and art are very close. I knew that already. In both science and art you're making hypotheses. Then you try things, you experiment, in the lab or in the studio. Both are very hands-on, but in art, you have more latitude about what the experiments are, and a different set of materials. But there is a lot of science the artist has to know: the chemistry of paint, the physics and chemistry of ceramics, for example. It's not just monkeying around with stuff free-for-all.

The science students were terrific in terms of learning art skills because they were already good observers. They were methodical and they weren't afraid of materials. They were in it for hard work. You gave them homework and they did it. And the art students loved getting into the science labs.

Dharshi was absolutely brilliant about coming up with chemistry labs for the students that taught scientific aspects of light but were also creative. The labs covered different kinds of light such as radiated light, absorbed light. For example, we did the chemistry of sparklers and the chemistry of dyes. And we had a terrific texts that covered the history of theories of light, optics, bioluminescence, light and health - all kinds of stuff.

Dharshi was constantly amazed because, within the structure of the of the labs, the art students would always take an extra step in terms of creativity. Instead of making a straight sparklers, they'd make sculptural sparklers. Instead of just, okay, I'll just make this simple tie-dye, they made really inventive ones.

Fiksdal: Creativity in the lab. Wow.

Aurand: Yeah, within safe limits. And Dharshi and I took seriously something that was more common in the early years, which was that we worked alongside the students as master learners. For example, I did all of the labs and all of the homework and turned in lab reports.

Fiksdal: Oh, my goodness.

Aurand: And stayed up till 3:00 trying to remember my high school algebra! And Dharshi did all of the studio projects. She learned oil painting and stayed up till 3:00 in the morning painting. We exhausted ourselves, but we had a blast. That's what was key in early programs, this commitment of faculty to step out of their comfort zones and try a new discipline. The programs where faculty actually did that were invariably the best.

Fiksdal: Yeah, I agree, and I think that idea of putting yourself in the students' shoes helped you also. Because I remember I did some of that, too, all through my career, and I was able to say, "Look, I just don't understand this. Help!" By having to help me, my colleague would be able to explain things in several different ways to the students as well.

Aurand: That's right. Because a lot of times students won't say anything until the last possible moment when you're moving on and they didn't get it.

Fiksdal: Exactly.

Aurand: I did the work along with the students all the time, I think in almost every program, because for me, that was part of the fun of getting to teach at Evergreen. Getting to actually try a new discipline, learn a new discipline, read the books, try the labs. A lot of the faculty I worked with were less willing to try the art stuff.

Fiksdal: Isn't that interesting, that it's harder to put yourself out there in the name of creativity?

[laughter] "Let me just stay in my confines here."

Aurand: It says more about our culture and this silly notion about talent—that you either have it or you don't—when just like most things it's really just a set of learnable skills.

Dharshi and I also taught a second version of the Light program. The first one was a whole year-long program.

Fiksdal: Oh, was it? And did students stay in for the whole year?

Aurand: They did. It was junior-senior-level, so it really worked well. It was a case of really proving that interdisciplinary programs worked best when students already had some skills under the belt. Although we did have one student who was a freshman. The first day, we said, no, no, no, but he refused to go away. Finally, we let him in, and he was terrific. That was an example of the kinds of students we had in the early years. They were really passionate about learning, knew what they wanted, and saw that they could take advantage of Evergreen to learn it. In the Light program students ended the year by doing large individual projects. They could pick any topic under the general theme of light and research it. This freshman made holograms! We hooked him up with staff support, he got the tools, and he made actual holograms. Then he went on to have a career in that. It was amazing!

One of the great things about those programs, too, was that a broad theme like Light allowed students to find and pursue their own particular passions under the large thematic umbrella. For example, we had students who were interested in health—the relationship of light and health, for example, the difference between exposure to full-spectrum light and artificial lights. They developed research projects on that. Other students were interested in light and vision, or in animal vision. The funniest one was a research project on the history of reported cases of spontaneous combustion in humans and on whether they had any possible scientific basis. At the end it was this amazing carnival of diverse, creative projects, combined with scientific research.

Fiksdal: Students were asked to do both, I imagine?

Aurand: Absolutely. They did both all three quarters, but the third quarter, in addition to the labs and studio projects that they were doing, had their own research project that had to have a creative component, not necessarily a lab component, but a scientific component in the sense of reading scientific papers. Then, a big presentation at the end. They presented their projects, I think, for the Science Carnival.

Fiksdal: You mentioned oil painting. What other kinds of art did you teach in that program?

Aurand: We started with drawing, just black and white, progressed into color using pastels, and other water media, and then into oil painting. It was basically, within the context of that program, the same curriculum I would have taught in a regular studio art program over the course of a year.

When Dharshi and I taught together the third time, it was a program called "From the Fire: the Art and Science of Ceramics", because ceramics is all about what's happening chemically when you subject different earth minerals materials to heat. The clay itself changes chemically and the various minerals in glazes, like cobalt, copper, nickel, all oxidize and change color in the silica matrix. It was perfect.

Fiksdal: That was a completely different topic.

Aurand: It was a different topic.

Fiksdal: In both of those topics, for Dharshi, who is used to teaching also in a sequence of theorems and ideas and approaches to chemistry, she must have felt okay at the end that the students did learn chemistry.

Aurand: In each program we taught, about half the students started with a science background and half had an art background. She correctly guessed that the students coming in with an art background might be terrified of the chemistry. So she always started at the very beginning. She said, let's review. Atoms. And went from there. But she designed the lab work and lectures so that by the end, we were doing the same lab that they were doing in the straight science program Matter and Motion.

Fiksdal: Wow.

Aurand: She brought students along quickly, really.

Fiksdal: So, she did do a step-by-step process, but still concerned itself mostly with light. Matter and Motion or Molecules to Organism?

Aurand: I think it was Matter and Motion. I forget exactly now, but she told the students they could be very proud of themselves because the last lab that they were doing was the same one that the serious chemistry students were doing.

Fiksdal: That sounds also like she may have been able to borrow a couple from her previous teaching. Creating labs is very time consuming.

Aurand: Exactly.

Fiksdal: You have to test it.

Aurand: Yeah.

Fiksdal: You mentioned that you did three programs with her. What was the third?

Aurand: We did a year-long version of Light—a second, shorter version, where we had to really say, how do we take this and condense it? What can we do in a quarter? And then we did “From the Fire: The Art and Science of Ceramics.”

Fiksdal: Nice. Fire and light. Sounds great.

Aurand: Yeah. Teaching with Dharshi is great because she always, for fun, blows stuff up at the end of the program. She’d say, “Okay, c’mon. We’re going to make a big noise.” Pretty fun.

Fiksdal: If that word gets out, that’s going to inspire a lot of faculty and students to take her program. That’s helpful to understand how you might work with a science faculty. In that case, it started with friendship, but I think there can be times when you come up with an idea or question and you want to explore it further.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: I am sure she enjoyed that a lot. Do you know if she was able to teach with other faculty outside the sciences?

Aurand: Not sure.

Fiksdal: That’s fine. I just was wondering.

Aurand: I think she’s going to again. I think she’s going to teach with Julia Heinecus, who is the fine metals teacher. But I know that for the last couple years, she’s been back just teaching in the science rotation.

Fiksdal: You’re probably only allowed so much to rotate out, if that’s the problem. Okay. You feel, in your career, that you were able to choose what you wanted to do. You weren’t constrained too much. One constraint I can think of is that we did have studios, and they had to be used, and I know that we had staff covering that, but that would just be a course. In order to make it more interdisciplinary, that must have weighed on your mind a bit.

Aurand: Yes, in the studio arts, like in other areas of the college, as the college grew, there was a push to try to have a more predictable, sequential slate of programs so that students could develop specific skill sets. It was always a challenge. How do you do that and still allow faculty the freedom to go off and

try some new crazy idea? There was always tension between the need to teach straight skills and theme exploration.

Then also in the visual arts area we had faculty who just really hated teaching the entry-level skills programs. I enjoyed it. I always liked that part, so I would often rotate it in. The entry level visual arts skills program was either called Foundations of Visual Art or Studio Projects. The name would change. It was for students hoping to focus on studio art. I regularly taught that. I enjoyed it but I didn't want to do it every year. If I had been teaching at a regular university I could have easily done that year in and year out until I was a senior faculty. Ugh.

But even in the foundation art program —I think I talked about this before—I made it so that students got connected to personal themes for their own studio work, because then they would feel a drive, an urgency to develop skills. I learned that from teaching with Marilyn Frasca. Students then knew why they were developing skills. It wasn't just, well, once you get really proficient at X, then you'll know what to make. Instead, you want to make that thing? Then you need to learn shading or how to run wood through the table saw and miter a corner, or understand color theory.

Fiksdal: That was the opposite of your own experience.

Aurand: Yes. And I didn't feel locked in. I felt like I was the luckiest person on earth to have the amount of autonomy I had in teaching.

Fiksdal: Yeah. One place where we had a little less autonomy was governance. We were expected to devote part of our time every year to sometimes really big projects and sometimes smaller. I wonder if you want to speak a bit about that.

Aurand: There are faculty to whom I will always be grateful who took on these giant governance tasks of reviewing the college and making a new plan, etc. I did governance work primarily in two areas. First, there was an ongoing visual arts group. It changed names, but basically, it was about public art on campus and building the college's art collection. As buildings were built, money for art on campus was generated through the Percent for Art law. I think I was on three of those committees over the years, which is a series of meetings and reviewing artists' proposals. Also, as the college art collection was built, there were acquisition meetings and then there a long battle to try to get a real gallery space on campus and a gallery director. For a long time we just used a classroom, and I also ran the gallery for a bit, before we had a dedicated space.

Fiksdal: Where was that?

Aurand: We used the fourth-floor space in the library—there was a room down the hall from the old cafeteria on the fourth floor of the library. I did that for a year and then helped with it for another year.

The other major governance that I did was being on the Hiring DTF. That was fascinating, reading people's resumes and essays. It was self-interest, too. because but when we hired somebody, at least in the early years, we were hiring them to the college as a whole.

Fiksdal: Exactly.

Aurand: And you wanted a good, interesting colleague.

Fiksdal: And you might want to teach with them. [laughing]

Aurand: Right. Gosh, I don't remember how many years, but it was a lot of years I was on the Hiring DTF, which was pretty time-consuming.

Fiksdal: It is. And all those dinners. [laughter]

Aurand: I kind of liked that part.

Fiksdal: We used to do potlucks, and then suddenly, we were in restaurants. That was kind of fun. There was a certain camaraderie in those hiring groups, too, and/or you really saw where their interests lay if they weren't collaborative.

Aurand: Right. I did other governance stuff, such as being on the Sponsored Research Committee. And I was Convener for the Arts area five or six times.

Aurand: The Hiring DTFs were very time-consuming, but it was worth it. I liked it.

Fiksdal: All along during your career of teaching, I'm sure you were making art. I'm wondering how satisfied you were with your ability to have time to do that. Naturally, there are other things besides a career that intervened, because you had a family and there are all kinds of other things that intervene in that. But you were an artist, and are an artist, so I'd like to know if you can think of the same kind of thing as your career. Was there a trajectory, or were there mostly ups and downs, or was there any kind of line that you can [draw]?

Aurand: I think that I, like many of the arts faculty, found it a constant challenge to —and I don't think it was unique to the arts - to carve out time for my own studio work. The teaching was so creative in terms of coming up with curriculum. You couldn't just pull the same lecture out of the box and deliver it. So, when I was teaching, my own work often ground to a halt. During the summers, I'd get started again, and then right as I was getting into the rhythm of it, school would start again. It made for a very jerky art career. It meant that I had to choose where to put my energy. I had gallery representation in Seattle in the early years and had to let it drop. I could not keep up with what the gallery owner wanted in terms of production. It was too much stress. I wasn't one of those people who wanted to be super famous. It was not part of my sense of self. I loved making art, but I didn't feel that my self-worth was measured by how many exhibitions I had, or by whether I got collected in museums and stuff like that.

I really liked teaching, and I stayed active as a professional artist because you have to. Otherwise, you're teaching from no fresh experience. But I know it was a frustrating thing for many of my colleagues, and I think maybe not just in the arts. I don't know. There are some science faculty who are still doing original research projects, but a lot of people aren't.

Fiksdal: In the early years—we should say this—the first faculty to form the college and for several years after came because they wanted to teach, and they did not want to do research. So, in fact, there was no support for research at all for quite a while, except there was always support for the science faculty. When I decided to do research in the 1990s, I started to get going, connecting my work to Evergreen with seminar work, analyzing the discourse analysis of seminars. Some money was found, but it was for anyone who wanted to come and talk about their research. I remember Sally Cloninger was there, who's an artist, so there were a lot of different people in the room, but there wasn't any sustained effort to help us with research, or with work that we were doing.

I can see, though, that in your own work, there would be problems that you wanted to solve, and that those might be something you would want to put into your teaching.

Aurand: In the early years, there weren't even art studios. We were working in lab rooms or just in seminar rooms. I don't know if science faculty, when they were hired, were given labs, which is a normal thing at a regular university. And artist faculty at regular universities are given studios, but there was no space like that. Finally, with the remodel of Lab I, we carved out one room—that is, we commandeered one science lab—and it became the art faculty studio for those who wanted it. I worked in there for a number of years. By that time, though, most of the arts faculty had just given up and made studios off campus. But that meant that students couldn't see your personal work on campus, they couldn't come by. It was really a loss.

I don't remember when the summer faculty development grants got started, but those really helped. I got a number of those.

Fiksdal: That was what I was talking about in 1990. I almost think it was maybe then.

Aurand: Yeah.

Fiksdal: I'm not sure.

Aurand: That was good, and I got several of those. Which was nice because I would have done work anyway, but it was nice to have it recognized and to have some compensation for that.

Fiksdal: I think the recognition is important because we had to write proposals, and then our colleagues would read them, and then know a little bit more about what we were doing. I think that so much of our work was just known to us.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: Really recognizing us, and talking to all my colleagues about their oral histories, we tried in a number of ways to get to know each other better. There were a lot of different structures for that.

Aurand: Right. But I did continue to do my own artwork throughout. Originally, I was doing ceramics when I came to the college. Then I had a sabbatical in Paris in 1980, and I couldn't do ceramics there. I got a studio there and started drawing, so that marked the shift from 3-D work into 2-D work. After that, I was doing mostly drawing and painting. And some printmaking.

Fiksdal: Space really matters to an artist. [laughter] You're impressing that upon me here. It changed your life.

Aurand: Access to space and tools.

Fiksdal: Yeah. So, you've retired now. I'm wondering how you're creating your life after Evergreen. You were so busy, and you were very creative in your work, and you did all the work that students did, so you must have had a bit of a respite now that you've stopped teaching.

Aurand: I expect you know that when one retires, there's first the honeymoon period where every day is Saturday, and you think, I'll go out to breakfast. Let's go out to lunch. Let's go here. Let's go there.

Then it's, what am I going to do with the rest of my life? I never thought I would have any trouble, and I haven't, in terms of what to do, because I just shifted into spending more time in studio and doing other things that I like that are creative.

But the loss of connection with other faculty has been a big blow. Since retiring, it's made me realize how a rich and intellectual environment Evergreen was. Even not teaching with someone, you'd have these little, short conversations on campus. What are you doing? What's your program? How's your program doing? There's a brilliant bunch of people out there. I miss that. I miss that camaraderie, the collegial interactions.

Fiksdal: Just a short walk across Red Square could change your life for the next two years.

Aurand: Right, it sure could. [laughter]

Fiksdal: I do miss that, too.

Aurand: Even just reading people's program descriptions, catalog copy. I was on the catalog review DTF. I was on that for a long time.

Fiksdal: That's governance.

Aurand: Yes, I forgot that. I've probably forgotten 50 percent of what I did. How to rebuild that sense of community in retirement is more of a challenge, especially because many of the friendships that I

made, those folks were 10 to 15 years older, because I was younger. Maybe some were 20 years older, and many have now died. Yeah, that's hard.

Fiksdal: That's very hard. Tell me about the public art that you worked on. You had to apply. I know of one piece that you did because I happened to stumble upon it one day when I came on the wrong day to your house. [laughing] At an elementary school in Eastern Washington. But you may have done more.

Aurand: I did three large public projects, all for schools, and would have done two more but had to backout because life was too crazy at the time. The way public art in Washington works is that artists can apply to be in a registry held by the Washington State Arts Commission. When A committee from that institution or agency decides what they want. They develop a set of criteria and then a project manager from the Washington State Arts Commission matchmakes between the committee and artists from the registry. The committee reviews the work of 100 artists—flash, flash, flash, slides going by like this. Then they winnow it down to 30, and then to one, and the selected artist gets a phone call saying, “You've been selected. Do you want it?”

Then there's a two-stage process where the artist meets with the committee, goes back over what they're hoping for, the artist listens, and then makes a proposal. There's a contract just for the proposal phase. If the proposal is accepted, then there's a contract for the execution phase. Then the artist makes the work and installs it.

I loved those because I loved the idea of having art in schools. I liked working to try to have the artworks connect the students and staff to their environment, the history of the place, and the native species, to get people connected to place.

I did one for the Olympic Middle School in Shelton. I did one in Othello, at Wahitis Elementary School. The last one was in Quincy, Washington, for another elementary school. In each case, I did a lot of research—it was really fun—on the natural history, the Indigenous peoples, the geology, the native flora and fauna, etc., and then tried to come up with something that would spark imagination, engage kids, but also make them curious about where they lived. It was really fun.

Fiksdal: That must have been a lot of collaboration, because you'd have to talk to people about your ideas, and then they would talk to you about that, right?

Aurand: Yeah.

Fiksdal: Do you feel that your original vision was adaptable enough to fit in those situations?

Aurand: Yes. I think generally I got picked because I'm fairly realistic in my painting style, and, I think, because I tend to do that, tend to reflect nature back, and try to make people feel engaged and fall in love with where they live.

But also, I think my teaching at Evergreen made me a good listener, able to really hear what the committee was telling me about what their hopes were. I didn't have a big ego need to make it about my own ideas. I felt, in those situations—in a public art situation—that I have a skillset and I'm happy to put it into service of these people. It always comes out with my weird tweak to it anyway, but I feel like I'm successful when they feel like it's their work. The principal over in Othello, I got such a kick out of his reaction. I had just finished the installation on the day when the school was registering new kids. The principal had called up a bunch of his principal buddies, and he was touring them up and down the halls. There were six pieces—no, eight pieces—down both sides of a long hallway, and he was saying, "Now, look at our art. Come and look. Do you recognize this? You know, we went fishing there. Look at this." He was taking ownership. "Our art." I thought, yea! I got it. He didn't say, "Oh, this is the art that the artist gave us." Instead, "This is ours."

Fiksdal: That's terrific. It must have really made you feel good.

Aurand: It did.

Fiksdal: You achieved your goal. And somehow, you were able to show them, like you said, that sense of place, but it's a little different when you have one person saying, "This is where we did this. This is where we go to fish," or whatever. It's really good to include those spots. I think you'll be busy for years to come.

Aurand: I'm not doing any more public art right now.

Fiksdal: That takes a lot of time and effort.

Aurand: Yeah, they're too big and too stressful.

Fiksdal: I think we can turn now—I wanted to ask you about Evergreen's future. There was an article in the newspaper this morning about the fact that we have—they now have, I always say "we" when I'm talking about Evergreen—2,100 students registering in the fall, which is better than in the last few years, but way lower from when I left Evergreen. I'm just wondering what you think Evergreen's future is as an interdisciplinary liberal arts four-year college out in the woods in Olympia.

The vision changed from the very beginning, where the founders thought it would be this residential college, and students would all live on campus. Almost from the beginning, practically no students wanted to live on campus, and that was logical because it is in the woods, and it is cut off from town. You have to have money for a car or get on that bus at certain times of the day.

Obviously, it has changed, but those of who were there since the beginning—you're one of them—might have some ideas about that.

Aurand: I think it's a very different college than even when I left a few years ago. I think you can still call it an interdisciplinary college, but barely, I guess. In the last couple of years, I have made myself stop reading e-mails and stop tracking, partly just because I found myself grieving [at] what I saw as mistakes that were being made.

I don't remember what year it was, but I was driving back from Seattle listening to an advertisement for Evergreen that came on, and it said, "There's this arts and sciences college." I thought, wait a minute. Where's "interdisciplinary"? Where's "innovative"? Where's "liberal arts" in that advertisement? Language counts. Change the language and everything changes.

Fiksdal: And where's the humanities?

Aurand: Right. Somebody, without asking the faculty, had decided that the marketing needed to be changed. I felt that Evergreen blew it because it failed to recognize that, yes, even if the culture is changing, and even if students are changing, there are plenty of students who would trek across country to come to a college where they can do genuine interdisciplinary arts/science or arts/humanities or humanities/science programs.

When they stopped advertising it that way—it was like shooting themselves in the foot, in my opinion—they failed to hire people who really could do more than one thing, who genuinely came in with an interest in cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary work, and had strength in at least two disciplines. It has gradually become just a small college. Not to say that it isn't still doing some of that terrific work, but it seems—from talking to friends, colleagues who've retired, and those who are still there—it's less and less interdisciplinary, it seems.

I don't know. I feel very fortunate to have been at the college when it was this bold experiment. Its future, I don't know. It seems very unsure to me. When the leadership is concerned about the money instead of about ideas about education, instead of having a vision, inspiring boldness and creativity in faculty, then you're just going to get these makeshift solutions that really don't fix anything.

And the culture has changed. As you know, in the early years, you'd ask students, "How did you come to Evergreen?" and somebody would say, "This friend of mine told me about it and I hitchhiked across the country." Students don't do that anymore. [laughing]

Fiksdal: No, it really was a Mecca. I remember I had a student after the first quarter she was there, she said, "This isn't perfect. I thought it would be perfect. I thought it was a utopia." I said, "We're working on it, but I think that's what utopias are all about. You work. You don't achieve it. Maybe it's not achievable." She left anyway. [laughter] But I did try.

I remember that feeling. I think we were all working towards that vision. But the thing you said about faculty really struck home. I think that for most of us, from the very beginning, the college was faculty driven in the sense that the work of the faculty really mattered. Staff and students were part of all of that, but the curriculum was what brought students to the college. We used to open it up, so they got to participate in the program planning.

Aurand: I think some of it was a function of trying to grow the college beyond where it should have gone in terms of size. There's a big difference between what you can do with 2,000 students and what you can do when you are supposed to grow to 5,000 students. It's just structurally more complicated and that engenders hierarchy. It engenders more layers of administration.

But it was also when the faculty union came in. For me, that was a turning point philosophically from the vision that we were all in this together. We were all equal. The administrators, bless their hearts, were faculty who would take on an extra job and then were glad to rotate back out of it. But soon we had professional administrators in opposition to faculty. It changed the tone of the college, in my opinion, as did the kinds of more narrow discipline-focused hires we got later. I don't know. The future, I don't know. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Good. Let's pause.

[recording turned off]

Aurand: We started talking about the future of the college and how it's changed over the years, and I talked about the union coming as, in my opinion, a watershed. But I think what happened, quite apart from the union and Evergreen's failure to hire people from inside for the administration, was this: you can have a first generation and maybe a second and even third generation of faculty who say, "We're making this new thing." But I remember that by the '80s, new faculty would be hired, and they'd say, "Okay, I'm trying to understand the Evergreen way. The Evergreen tradition." And I'd go, "No, no, no, no. There's no Evergreen tradition. There's no Evergreen way. The whole thing is that the faculty are making this college anew all the time."

That sense of ongoing experiment where all faculty had equal footing got lost. By the end, I was trying to persuade faculty of their own power. They did not understand that they had power as faculty to make the college. By the time I retired, they didn't, but for most of my time there, they did.

Fiksdal: Absolutely.

Aurand: The faculty could say, "This isn't working. Let's throw it out and start over." Yeah, it's a lot of work to be continuously re-working a college, but then, the faculty are invested. You're not just, "Okay, just tell me what to do and I'll go do it." That sense that we could throw the whole thing wide open

again and try something new, and that each faculty member had exactly the same amount of power and responsibility for making the college as everybody else. That got lost somewhere along the way. That's when it stopped being experimental, I think.

Fiksdal: I like this point, and I think this whole notion that you yourself can have a vision of the college, and you have to join with others, obviously, to make any changes, but that that is part of your work.

Aurand: I'll give you an example. In the '80s—I forget what year it was, I can find it—we were sitting around in one of the visual arts meetings, and everybody was complaining about—it was '86-'87, around in there—"It's too hard to get our own studio work done." So Marilyn Frasca said, "Let's just make our own work at the center of the next round of art curriculum." She gave this little talk about how in the Renaissance artists had studios and take on apprentices who wanted to learn. They'd learn a whole bunch of good skills and the artists could get some work done. [laughing] So she persuaded the whole arts area, including the music and performing arts faculty, to make their own work the center for that was the kind of freedom faculty felt they had early on.

Fiksdal: Yeah, that's so renewing.

Aurand: We could just try a whole new thing for a year. So, we all declared ourselves "artists in residence" for the year in our own programs, and it worked. [laughing]

Fiksdal: That's great.

Aurand: That ability, the ability to at least think that way, that we don't have to do it the way everybody else does it, and we don't have to do it the way we did it the last five years. We could come up with something new. Somehow, that gradually went away, because incoming faculty felt like there was this Evergreen history, this tradition, a single Evergreen way of doing it, and that was inhibiting to them, and disenfranchising.

Fiksdal: I used to tell people, "There isn't one way." When I first arrived, I taught in the very first year of the college—it was just parttime—I would hear arguments still going on and people argued basically for the first five years. And then they stopped arguing so much, but they would try in different ways to get their own way supported.

That was the best thing is that people disagreed, and talked it out, or tried it out. If no one listened to them, they just tried it on their own, and then reported, "This worked. Let's do it." I think people don't understand that evolution of the Evergreen way, if there ever was one way.

But it certainly had to do with knowing your colleagues, talking to them enough so that you could plan programs, coming up with either a theme, as you said, or a problem or a question, and then letting it go and see what happened. I don't know how many times the trajectory of what I thought we

were doing changed because of the fabulous students, or some great idea one of us had. We would just change it then. That was fine. If anything, that's the Evergreen way.

Aurand: Right. I just think about the faculty retreats. I don't know if they even do them anymore, but in the early years of the college, it wasn't about planning curriculum, it was about getting to know each other. There were retreats, for example, up at Fort Flagler where the fact that faculty were out there playing Capture the Flag on the lawn and staying up all night on the beach to look at the stars, and having poker games that went on all night – all resulted in friendships, and it made for teaching partnerships, and it made for an exchange of ideas.

Fiksdal: Yeah, I think those retreats were three days long. They were long. I remember because it was difficult for those of us with children. But I still went. Somehow, we were there. I remember one year being so uncomfortable in my sleeping bag in a dorm room of some sort at Fort Flagler or Fort Worden or something that I was talking to people about how I needed to get out of there. Nancy Allen said, "You can share my room. I have a hotel room." [laughter] So, we drove off to her hotel room. That was just such a cheating, exciting thing to do.

This makes me think of retreats in our programs, and that was also a time to get to know the students better. I remember helping to cook. I remember cooking with the students. All of that really pulled us together, too, and made the program better. I know later on, we had to reduce those, and I remember having seminars at my house, for example, as just a way for them to get off campus, see another space, understand a little bit who I was just from my surroundings. But mostly, just being more comfortable in a comfortable chair.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: That was fun, too, but I think a lot of those things have gone.

Aurand: The budgets were very ample in the first years.

Fiksdal: They were.

Aurand: And the larger culture was less litigious. There was not all the worry about, can I take students on this fieldtrip, or is something going to happen, and I'll get sued? It did start inhibiting what faculty did, I think.

Fiksdal: My last fieldtrip to France for the quarter was in 2003. That was a long time ago.

Aurand: I remember in the early years being sent as a representative of the college, along with, I think, Phil Harding. There were three or four of us who were sent to a conference in higher education where faculty from different colleges were getting together to talk about problems in teaching. We're sitting

there with these faculty from other universities in the state and they're saying, "How do you get students to talk in class?" And we're going, "How do you get them to stop talking?" [laughter]

They looked at us, and I realized that in my experience at Evergreen, we were so lucky because we could make these little learning communities. People talked and argued and were engaged. That was remarkable.

Fiksdal: It was remarkable in those first years, too, because people did their work, students did their work. In the last probably five to 10 years, there were fewer students who did their work, in my experience, and that was harder.

I remember trying an idea. We gave them one credit in consciousness if they filled out a little survey every week and talked about what they read, in a very brief way, and told us how many hours a week they devoted to their study. It was very revealing, because all my life, I had been telling students, "This is 40 hours a week of work, at least. You may go over, but that's the job, it's fulltime study."

But as students started working more and more parttime, it became harder and harder to really even say that because I knew it wasn't true. If they were working 20 hours and maybe had a child, and then were trying to go to school, there's just no way they were doing 40 hours of work, and the data showed they weren't doing that. I found that the mean was 20 hours for fulltime work.

But the consciousness idea was just to get them to think about what they were doing, to reflect on their learning a little bit by filling this out. Some students still didn't do it and lost that credit.

Aurand: In the early years when the percentage of out-of-state students was higher, they all looked like they dressed at the Goodwill—raggedy and stuff like that—and you couldn't tell who had money and who didn't have money. Since many were out-of-state students, they were affluent, and many were older, returning students who had tried traditional colleges and weren't having it, and were really ready to go.

When the recruiting shifted toward in-state, direct-from-high-school students from southwest Washington, and the culture changed, we started getting students who weren't ready for college, who didn't know much about Evergreen except that it was handy. They didn't have a clue about interdisciplinary studies. They hadn't chosen Evergreen for that. And many of them would have done better in a traditional college where there would have been more hand-holding and a very structured curriculum.

It also seemed that over the decades the level of preparation in terms of work done in high school dropped. In one of the last programs I taught, the Consciousness program with Don Middendorf, a junior/senior-level program, too, I was bemoaning the fact that you couldn't ask students to read a

book a week anymore as in the first years of the college. Don said, "Watch this." He asked students how long it had been since they read a complete book. Some of them had to go back to kindergarten since they'd been asked to read a whole book that wasn't a graphic novel or a comic book!

Fiksdal: In 2017, I helped out in a program, and I just had charge of seminars for a colleague, and things were not going well. Students were not talking much, and it was the third session, so I decided to ask a similar question. I said, "How many of you have read a whole book in your whole life?" Not everyone raised their hands. This was 18 students. I've forgotten the exact number, but it was pitiful. It was eight, maybe, who raised their hands, and some of them partially. So, this idea of reading a book has gone by the wayside somehow for some students.

Aurand: They weren't asked to in high school, unlike in my high school experience. Instead, they are given worksheets and handouts, or they only read chapters of books, or excerpts of books. To come to Evergreen where, in the early days, it was a book a week, and it was a tough book a week, plus all the other lab work and studio work and stuff like that, it was a big jump for many students.

Fiksdal: But losing a whole book a week doesn't bother me so much. It's just understanding where they are, that they don't have the idea of that perseverance that goes along with going from the beginning to the end of an entire work. It is possible to design the reading in such a way that students can get to the heart of the matter. They can read different chapters and then talk together. There are a whole lot of ways, but understanding that was a shock, even though I had been reading about it and I knew the students had changed a lot. But still, it's a huge change for us because we had seen this long trajectory.

Aurand: Right. I don't know whether it's a chicken-and-egg thing, but the students really did change, and the kind of work you could plan to do, expect to be able to do, then had to change.

Fiksdal: Yes.

Aurand: Yes, you could still do really good work by the end, but the range of students was much, much broader. We still had some brilliant, high-achieving students who would just take the work and run with it, but also, I felt more and more that I was doing remedial work, work I wasn't trained to do. Because it was also that more students were coming in with large emotional problems.

Fiksdal: That came to my mind as you said that, not being trained.

Aurand: Not just disabilities.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Aurand: I felt like, okay, I'm not trained as a therapist, but it seems to be about 50 percent of my work.

Fiksdal: And you're not sure what you should be asking them to do given their various disabilities. That was always very hard also. Yeah, so I don't know. That's part, though, of what the college has to address now.

Aurand: Right. Of course, it's fun to teach just the smart, accomplished, ready-to-go students, but it's an open question now. What should education look like and who is it for? I have strong feelings that everyone should have access to higher education, so it's a tough call. [laughing] Just financially, it's going to get harder and harder to have access.

Fiksdal: Do you feel there should be better access?

Aurand: I think there should be better access all along to good quality education. I think, for a First World country, we really are not doing a good job in education all along. It's partly because we don't pay teachers well. We don't respect teachers at any level in this culture. But that's a whole other issue.

Fiksdal: Yeah, but I do think that's part of the problem, too, is that students are coming to college in order to get a degree so that they can get a job so that they can make a lot of money, and they're more interested in what that degree will do for them. It's a little more transactional than what we were talking about with the love of learning.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: I think that's a big hurdle for the college as well.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: I'm going to pause again.

[recording stopped]

Aurand: Did I mention earlier about seeing the advertisement, and suddenly, liberal was gone as a word, interdisciplinary was gone? Now, social justice is in. If you look at how the college is described on the first page, it comes up and there's something about commitments to social justice, which is great. We all should be. [laughter] But when you put that upfront as an advertiser, then what you're saying is, okay, we want to announce that we're politically liberal. What about students who want to go to a really good college who maybe don't want to be identified as such, or who perhaps are coming from more conservative backgrounds? My point is that nobody asked the faculty as a whole whether they wanted to suddenly have that be the defining attribute of the college.

Fiksdal: I haven't looked at that, I have to say. I should.

Aurand: Yeah. It's a very different thing to say this is a liberal arts college. That tells you something. A liberal arts and sciences college. Innovative. But there was not an announcement of a political agenda in any of that. You could think what you want to think.

Fiksdal: It's an important thing to think about now, especially now that we're just such a divided society in every way.

Aurand: Especially because of the hullabaloo that happened, was it two years ago now? With Bret Weinstein, who is still actively blogging now against the college. In such a divided country right now, I was concerned when I saw that. I guess my point is not so much about any particular term used to describe the college, but that in the early years, any shift in language would have been brought to the faculty meeting as a whole and talked about. It would have been the faculty's choice as to how to describe the college, not made by a marketing consultant.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Aurand: What do we want to say about ourselves? What are we really trying to do here? What's our philosophy?

Fiksdal: It calls up how you structure yourself, what you're doing in your discipline, and what you're doing with others outside of your discipline when you're teaching cross-disciplinarily. That's a good point. Is it a mandate or what?

Aurand: Right, so at some point, the faculty stopped having ownership over the language that described their work.

Fiksdal: The marketing became more important.

Aurand: The marketing was contracted out.

Fiksdal: Maybe they have decided on social justice.

Aurand: Maybe they have. That's true. [laughter]

Fiksdal: We're talking about various types of colleagues.

Aurand: Right, and when I think about Evergreen, I think about what was wonderful for me—as somebody who came with just a little teaching experience in graduate school, so I really grew up as a teacher there—was the exposure to all these different approaches to teaching. I taught with some faculty who would have the whole quarter, every class session, planned out, every reading chosen before we started. No room for shifting. And next I'd teach with people who had a completely different approach. For example, Marilyn Frasca would have a general plan for a quarter, but she would come in and she'd actually look at what the students were making and change it if it was clear that something needed to shift. We might be in the middle of a drawing class, for example, and she'd and look at the students' drawings, and she could see that they were not really engaging with seeing, but instead drawing what they thought they knew. So on the spot, she'd make up some whole thing to wake them up, like she'd make them only make a mark every time she clapped. And suddenly, they're

waiting for the next clap, and then they could make a mark. It was brilliant - to come up with a new way to work on the spur of the moment—because she could see the students needed it.

Then there also were faculty who were so attuned to the students' emotional needs, too, that in the middle of something, and they'd say, "Okay, let's just stop and take our temperature. How is everybody doing? Do we need to talk about what's going on in the world right now?" You could feel the air clear. These faculty had confidence; they were these master teachers. I was constantly learning. We had the freedom to try stuff.

The early faculty, too, came from such diverse background. I taught with Beryl Crowe, and in the first class, he would always make what he called his "up against the wall" speech about the rules and expectations. But then he'd tell the students how he first got educated. He was in the Merchant Marines having been a poor kid from Oklahoma. He didn't have a formal high school education, but he knew where the library was, so each time he'd come into port, he'd go to the library and take out as many books as would fit in his seaman's chest. He didn't know what to read, so he just started at A and started reading. [laughing] So he told the students, "If there are gaps in my education, it's because I only got to S." [laughter] His point was that there's lots of ways to get an education and that it was up to them. It was their responsibility to figure out how to take advantage of what the program would offer.

In the early years of the college—I don't know if you had this experience—I had students come to me asking me to dock them credit so they wouldn't have to graduate yet. It happened almost every quarter. They'd say, "Please, could you just take off four credits, because they're going to boot me out of here because I'm over my limit on credits." I'd ask, "Why don't you want to graduate?" They'd say, "I have this project I want to do." And Photoland. And the Digital Imaging Studio. Students had access to these amazing resources that would vanish the minute they graduated. Or they'd say, "Oh, this program's being offered next year."

Fiksdal: I do remember letting people have less credit in a program for those same reasons.

Aurand: Exactly, so they could stay on. Right.

Fiksdal: I do remember that. But not docking credit. They'd just say, "Oh, I'll just be in here for eight credits." I'd say, "But you have to do everything because I can't keep track." They said, "All right."

Aurand: Exactly. I had a lot of that, where they'd enroll for less than full credit. But that was the deal. They still had to do all the work. But it was that recognition that they were in this enriched environment with access to these faculty and these resources and they wanted to take advantage of it.

Toward the end, that went away. It was, "Let me out of here. I want to just graduate and get out." That's when I felt like, okay, something we're doing is not catching them.

Fiksdal: In the case of Beryl, I'm reminded that we often hired people that didn't have PhDs.

Aurand: That's right.

Fiksdal: We hired all kinds of different people. I remember Hap Freund, who came as an attorney. He was an attorney, and he had to learn to teach. Other people like him, who grew in their jobs, like Gil Saucedo, who just had a master's degree, I believe, but really worked hard and learned a lot more history than he had probably done in graduate school. I can't think of lots of examples here, but I came in with a master's degree, you came with a master's degree. A lot of people.

Aurand: There were people who came in one field and quickly migrated to teaching in a new one.

Fiksdal: Switched. That's right. Kirk Thompson. He was a photographer and turned into a psychologist. Just taught himself. Many, many people did that.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: He was unusual because he never went back to photography that I know. Most people kept both things going.

Aurand: But I don't know how much of that happens these days. There was the push to have the college accredited, so that caused people to be released who didn't have PhDs, or you needed to have a certain number of PhDs.

Fiksdal: Oh, I don't remember that.

Aurand: I've forgotten who. There was a faculty member in the very early years whose main credential was that he had been in prison. Who was that?

Fiksdal: Oh, yes, I do remember. I had his name on my mind a while ago. Jim something.

Aurand: Right, so folks like that suddenly were no longer there.

Fiksdal: He also sort of . . . left on his own.

Aurand: For whatever reason, a number of those people weren't there, because the college became concerned about being an accredited school.

Fiksdal: I don't know if I asked you already about staff teaching, and your attitude or feeling about that. I think in several cases in the arts, they were hired in order to do that. But I think that became contentious after a while, so now, that's not happening.

Aurand: I always thought staff would, of course, want to teach, and should be allowed to teach. I was glad when there became a mechanism for that, because they deserved the same opportunities for development as faculty did. And they're good teachers. They're people who have a lot to offer.

Fiksdal: There were so many.

Aurand: I didn't get to teach with any. Yes and no. I worked with the printmaking staff. Don Jensen in the woodshop saved my life a number of times. He is brilliant at teaching skills. Not just skills, but how to conceptualize a project from beginning to end. He was a terrific sculptor himself. He could have gone on and done that, but he just liked being there.

I was always so grateful for the support of the staff and wanted them to feel like they were being valued and have the chance that they wanted to develop. I don't know. Maybe it was different in other areas.

Fiksdal: I think it was different in other areas because in the humanities, we didn't have staff. [laughter] [Although] there were staff around. Later, in Parttime Studies and Evening and Weekend Studies, some staff taught, and that was very good. That was an opportunity for them. But otherwise, I don't know.

Aurand: In individual arts, we were heavily dependent on staff to just keep the studios going. Almost always, they were very willing to work with fulltime faculty to embed workshops in programs or modules, and courses and classes in programs. There were obviously a few tensions and stuff.

I suppose in the area of tension, there were the photo staff, Hugh Lentz and Steve Davis. Steve developed Photoland. He did a brilliant job, and thank God for him and Hugh. But there was some tension about how they developed and taught a regular rotation of photography classes, but then the full-time photo and arts faculty wanted to teach in the darkrooms, they sometimes had difficulty getting access. By and large though, it just amplified the studio offerings and photography was so in demand, it was very attractive to students. We had one of the best photography programs, not just in the state but in the whole region, and one of the last wet darkrooms. When everybody went digital, the stuff that students could do at Evergreen was phenomenal.

Fiksdal: Thanks to Bob and Paul, who worked every summer doing that, I think, with students. Right?

Aurand: In terms of programs, yes. But the development of the facilities was due to Steve Davis and Hugh Lentz.

Fiksdal: I see what you mean.

Aurand: They ran it, and they kept it going. They trained all the aides and made it so that any student could go down to the Digital Imaging Studio or down to Photoland, and use the facilities. It was astonishing.

Fiksdal: That is something that Evergreen offered from the beginning. You could rent out incredible equipment from Media Loan, and there weren't a lot of rules attached to that. They still, I believe, are still open. That was very usual.

Aurand: yeah.

Fiksdal: I remember in the sciences, to have access to an electron microscope when you are a freshman, that was unheard of in the state, probably in the country. I think we've always had a lot of accessibility. That's something that the first deans made possible in their design of new buildings.

Aurand: Yes. Whoever conceptualized the library—I'm not sure whether that person was a Dean of the Library—but the story I heard when I came was that that person thought a library should be someplace where you could go to a drawer marked H and check out a hammer. Books and hammers are both tools, and libraries should be repositories of tools for learning. Sometimes it's a written text, and sometimes it's a hammer. That's why Media Loan wound up in the library, because a camera was considered a tool.

Fiksdal: I can't think of that person. I don't think he stayed long. He was there and then he left, but that was his idea. I just can't think now of his name. I'll have to think about it.

Aurand: Yeah. But it was things like that that I came from teaching in graduate school where I had to practically hock my car to get to use a slide projector to show in my classroom. The automatic response was "No," instead of the default being "Yes, let's see what we can do here." I loved that about the early years at Evergreen. Again, we had budgets, we had money, and we had a sense that education should be about empowering students.

Fiksdal: Yes, because at its founding, they were hoping to go up to 10,000 students really fast.

Aurand: Oy. [laughing]

Fiksdal: There was money. There were resources.

Aurand: Yeah.