

**Dave Hitchens**  
**Interviewed by John McLain**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**

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**FINAL**

**Hitchens:** What's up? What did you want to do today?

**McLain:** I've been looking at your 1990 Commencement address, and I was just sort of—I don't know if I have a question, so it might take me a minute to get to it. We can treat this a little like seminar. I was struck by the notion of a college, particularly that was set up like Evergreen, in which our motto was "Let it all hang out." And how most colleges and universities would say they're for truth, honesty and integrity. But at Evergreen, because of the way we set up the learning community model, the way that we set up, at least in intention initially, huge transparencies in what we do and how we do our work. That seems to have particular significance for Evergreen and our institution. I guess I'm just wondering if you have any comment about that. I might be reaching a little bit.

**Hitchens:** This is off the record. [NOTE 00:02:01]

**McLain:** Should I turn the recorder off?

**Hitchens:** No.

**McLain:** But don't quote you in the magazine.

**Hitchens:** Not on this one because I'm quoting Charlie McCann.

**McLain:** Oh, okay.

**Hitchens:** Charlie was a little disappointed when "Omnia Extares" turned out to be our model, because Charlie is an old Navy man. He commanded a minesweeper in World War II. Charlie believed that the motto of the college should be "No Chickenshit." [laughter]

**McLain:** In Latin, of course.

**Hitchens:** In Latin. So, he didn't grumble-grumble.

**McLain:** You guys took the easy way out, probably.

**Hitchens:** I don't know. [laughing]

**McLain:** Took the less controversial.

**Hitchens:** But that tonality, that structure, is what we were trying to get in terms of, as you were talking about, coordinated studies, and the kind of transparency, the openness, free exchange of ideas, helping people to understand things better, not imposing upon them any kind of “Here’s the Truth,” capital T. “And you better believe it or else you’re out, or you’d get a bad grade.” You know, that kind of stuff, which, as you well know from other institutions, that kind of stuff abounds.

I took a class at the University of Wyoming my senior year in American Literature. The professor, a fellow named Hugh Hetherington, taught a fairly interesting class. But Hetherington was also somebody who was kind of strange about—I don’t know whether he wasn’t real comfortable and confident in himself or not. But on written exams, if you could parrot back to him his own words, you got not only 100, you could get plus points.

**McLain:** Because you must be brilliant, then, if you thought like him.

**Hitchens:** Of course.

**Hitchens:** People told me this going in, and I wasn’t too sure whether to believe it or not. I thought, well, what the heck? I’ll give it a try. I’m pretty good at remembering what people say. On the midterm exam, out of the possible 100, I got 115 points.

**McLain:** Wow. That’s good recall.

**Hitchens:** I quoted him, but I didn’t put the quotation marks in. And on the final, out of 100 points, I got 120. I took a class in Southern literature from him as well, and I discovered it was the same thing. I knocked off two As. I had a very strong minor in literature.

**McLain:** This is your undergraduate?

**Hitchens:** Yeah. I was four semester-hours short of a double major. I could have had a double major in history and literature.

**McLain:** Was that troubling at all at the time?

**Hitchens:** At the time, I thought that was playing the game. But I often wondered how somebody would get by if they weren’t able to do that. It wasn’t that I had Hugh Hetherington bouncing in the back of my brain, but I had encountered other people who were teaching introductory classes. The guy I had to take introductory botany from at Wyoming had written the textbook that they were using. All you had to do was go through at the end of each chapter, run through the review questions—study the review questions—you could go on and you could pass the test. You weren’t doing anything other than re-reading things out of his textbook and reorganizing the exams based upon the review questions, and

that was it. But how honest is that? Somebody's paying for this. He's being paid by the State of Wyoming to offer some sort of quality education to students who come in and take classes.

So it raised certain kinds of issues, and one of the things we thought we were going to avoid by getting rid of academic rank and those kinds of distinctions, and having faculty seminars—where we helped each other understand the core material better so we could take it into the seminars and help students understand it better—that we could avoid having people die intellectually from the neck up; that we would always have a kind of—we hoped, at least that was my hope for sure—an active, inquiring, curious fun kind of faculty, where you're constantly trading new things and new ideas that you've encountered, or you run across.

I just had a conversation yesterday with Charlie McCann. He called up and he said, "You'll enjoy this. I just reread *The Iliad*. But I was troubled by something." In rereading *The Iliad*, he got worried about what happened when they were holding the funeral games for people who had fallen in battle, and the kind of—as he saw it now—adolescent approach by these Greek soldiers to what was going on. Then he calmly and quietly said, "But it's still very good." [laughter] I said, "Yeah." I raised a couple of things about why it is it endures, and how important it is to keep reading it.

I asked him which translation he'd read, and he had re-read the Fitzgerald translation. This was 41 years down the road from meeting him, and in the course of him calling up to say, "How are you doing?" he popped up with what he's been reading and thinking about, seeking my response and my opinion. That's the kind of thing that I thought we were constructing, and that's what I wanted to be a part of constructing.

The faculty would always provide interesting stuff for students. We wouldn't have people that you could easily pigeonhole. We wouldn't have old Professor Yellow Notes, a joke that I picked up from the guy that directed my doctoral dissertation. Old Professor Yellow Notes was a fellow who'd been around so long that the notes that he had originally written for his lectures had turned yellow. He would come in and he would open up his notes on the podium, and he would start talking.

He was carrying on one day and said, "And each year, tons and tons come down the Mississippi River." A little fellow in the back raised his hand and said, "Excuse me, Professor, but tons and tons of what come down the Mississippi River?" [laughter] Professor Yellow Notes thumbs through the pages before and after, and finally stopped, looks up, and says, "It doesn't say." [laughter] Well, that's the kind of thing we were trying to avoid, right there; that we wouldn't have Professor Yellow Notes wandering around the campus.

**Hitchens:** Ed Kormondy came to the meeting, and when he heard about the scholarship to honor my mother, he pledged 500 bucks right on the spot.

**McLain:** That's great.

**Hitchens:** What's nice about that is we've also got the matching funds from the Gates Foundation. Suddenly, here's 1,000 bucks added to—just bang!

**McLain:** You're going to have your endowment in no time.

**Hitchens:** Wow, it's kind of stunning.

**McLain:** That's great. By the way, Bill Ransom wanted me to tell you hello.

**Hitchens:** Oh, okay. What's he up to? Is he getting ready to step down?

**McLain:** I think he's going to stay through one more year. I'm not sure he's excited about that.

**Hitchens:** My sense is it's been a tough year for him.

**McLain:** Yeah, he's had a rough personal situation with a divorce and things.

**Hitchens:** Oh, I had no idea of that. That's not good.

**McLain:** No, so it's been a hard time.

**Hitchens:** I was thinking with the budget cuts and all of that kind of stuff.

**McLain:** Yeah, and that's just demoralizing all the way around.

**Hitchens:** It doesn't have to be. They cut our budget before we even opened, before the buildings were finished. January 1971, the budget was slashed. Oh, god what are we going to do? We said, "Great."

Growing to 25,000 students by 1984 seemed like a monumental task. This way we don't have to worry about it. We can be focused, we can stay lean and mean. We've got a curricular model that can adjust to whatever is necessary—five faculty, 100 students, and various permutations underneath that. Here's our chance. We can jump in and actually make it work, and we might do it better because we don't have to worry about expansion. It's the thing of making lemonade.

**McLain:** Yeah, I know. I've often thought that it's an opportunity for us to remember the core things that we're there to do and do those things.

**Hitchens:** Any suspicion of significant change coming out of rethinking teaching and learning at Evergreen?

**McLain:** There's a bunch of e-mail exchanges going from what they call the Cadillac version to the Subaru version to the Volkswagen version to the scooter version. I don't know if they're going to get anything out of it. Just this whole thing of whether they're going to do some kind of midpoint and endpoint summative evaluation by students—a reflection piece—and how that work was going to be done, and who was going to do it.

**Hitchens:** How did we get from rethinking teaching and learning to a summative evaluation?

**McLain:** I don't know, but the thing about the whole proposal has been that it's tried to solve too many different perceived problems with one swoop. They want to fix advising, they want to fix the transcript—I say "fixed" loosely—and they want somehow for this to help make more sense for students about the Pathway through their curriculum. So, I don't know.

**Hitchens:** My question—and the question that somebody maybe should ask—is, is there a problem? If so, whose problem is it?

**McLain:** I think that's exactly right. Is this a solution in search of a problem?

**Hitchens:** Yeah.

**McLain:** There was a very interesting piece in *The New York Times* a week or two ago about sort of a bromide to all the rah-rah graduation speeches you get this time of year, where people say, "You can do whatever you want. Follow your bliss." What it says instead is that what we've done is we've taken a group of people—of course, he's not talking about Evergreen—who have been the most supervised generation in history in terms of helicopter parents and somebody making everything okay for them all the way along the road. Then we throw them out into a world where it's chaotic and uncertain, and they're going to have five different jobs in the next 10 years, and at 15 years, many of them will work in jobs that don't exist today. He says, "We don't prepare people to do this well." I began to look at Evergreen and I said, "Maybe it's kind of a good thing that students come here and they have to figure this place out."

**Hitchens:** That's what we've always been about. We said to students, especially students right out of high school, "You come here, we're going to treat you like an adult because we think you're an adult. We're going to pose adult questions to you and you're going to have to figure things out. We'll help you, but we're not setting up a path that says, 'You go A to B to C to D to E and then you get out and you get that good job at 100 grand a year, and there you go.'"

**McLain:** Yeah. [laughing]

**Hitchens:** Which is what is being offered implicitly at other institutions these days. The more the corporate masters convince higher education “You’re not training people for our needs.” And the higher ed goes, “What do we do?” This last announcement that Boeing and Microsoft are going to each put in \$25 million to this new opportunity fund thing.

**McLain:** For science, technology and engineering.

**Hitchens:** Yeah. Right. Okay, but what’s going to happen? We need philosophers, we need people who can step to the side and say, “Wait just a damn minute here. This makes no sense. You engineers are doing X over here, and you scientists are doing Y over here, and you’re not talking to each other.” We need people who have that ability to do a holistic sense of things, which is, again, one of the things that I thought we were always about. We put out people who can sit around and go “Wait a minute. Here’s a significant problem, and here’s a possible solution.”

If we’ve got people who have the confidence to roll with the punches and solve problems on their feet, that’s been the strength of our graduates as they’ve gone out into this chaotic world. They go to work for various outfits who end up loving them because they have the ability to do that. If we increasingly compartmentalize and increasingly specialize within our curriculum, how are we going to produce those people that have the ability to be thinking from taking elements of the sciences and elements of economics and what have you and putting them together and saying, “Wait a second. This doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me and here’s why.” Or, “If we did it all this way, it would make better sense, don’t you think?” That kind of stuff.

**McLain:** One of the things that I found particularly disheartening when I worked at the HEC Board is, first, when we shifted from thinking more away from enrollment to degrees being produced, we changed the emphasis in our thinking about what our objective was; that it was always about this certain end product. Then we stopped talking about students as human beings and started talking about them simply as degrees being produced.

**Hitchens:** As product.

**McLain:** As product.

**Hitchens:** Yeah, raw material for product.

**McLain:** Exactly, and I just felt like there’s something very wrong here. It was always high-demand this and high-demand that.

**Hitchens:** But that so-called high demand fluctuates. One of the things, we had figures—in the planning year particularly—that indicated that only three percent of people who majored in a particular area would end up actually working in the area of their major. Three percent. Ninety-seven percent were going to be doing something that maybe had no direct connection to what they had majored in when they went to college. If that was the reality, we said, let's just train them to be problem-solvers, and be able to spot things, and go from there.

**McLain:** Yeah, this column I was telling you about was interesting, because he was saying he didn't think that people formed these perfect selves, and then went off and followed their bliss. He felt that people were called by a problem and responded to whatever problem there was. Maybe it was a family member who had Alzheimer's, or seeing a need for education for low-income people, and they built their lives around how they responded to that problem. I just thought that was such an interesting way, because it speaks very much to my own path. The plans I made didn't mean much. And having a major at a college like Saint Martin's meant that I had a much harder time letting go of my plans, because you've committed down a pathway at that point. Enough about me and what I think.

**Hitchens:** No, but that cycles back to your interest and concern about fundamental principles that we've tried to follow all the time, and still echo, that hover around maybe. Increasingly ghostly yet out there on the ranch, but maybe not. Every opportunity that has popped up when people have come along to try to—

The most famous one that I can recall just off the top of my head was Olander's effort to kind of undercut the curriculum, where people just turned and said, "Nothing doing." He was talking about strategic planning, and he set up this strategic planning DTF. The DTF went in, did its work, and came back and reaffirmed all the founding principles of the institution. I think that just pissed him off, and he was really puzzled by all of that because he thought he'd schmoozed and made enough promises here and there to get allies who would back him up, which indicated he never really understood the nature of the institution. And did what he always did—in terms of what I could tell from his career—he just went in and sucked the opportunities that would aggrandize himself, and then moved on. It was all about him, and he didn't really even care, which is sad.

But we've been vulnerable to that. There have been people who have moved in and out, who haven't stayed very long. We had a guy who was fulltime on our faculty here teaching in a fulltime coordinated studies program, while he was also a fulltime student in law school at the University of

Puget Sound Law School, before they sold it to Seattle U. When he finished his law degree, he said, “Bye-bye. Thank you very much.” In effect, “Goodbye and thanks for all the fish,” and took off.

**McLain:** Right. That was a student job.

**Hitchens:** Right, and yet with somebody else, he was allegedly fulltime on the faculty for a couple of years. He was also the fulltime organist at the Kingdome. He was up there playing the organ more than he was down here.

**McLain:** For the football and baseball seasons?

**Hitchens:** Right. So, we’ve been a little vulnerable to some of those kinds of things.

**McLain:** Saint Martin’s was one of the places where the Great Imposter worked that Tony Curtis played in the movie. They had their own problems with a highly regarded faculty member not even having the bachelor’s degree she said she had.

This area of truth and this challenge we have sort of sets up an interesting tension. In your commencement speech, you mentioned that the founders didn’t actually have unanimity on a single thing.

**Hitchens:** No. When I was explaining to you why we ended up trusting consensus, that gave us ways that somebody who really disagreed could still say, “Okay, I see out of the 17 of us who are here today, only a couple people really agreed with me, so I can back off.” We didn’t take votes on things. For the most part it was “Let’s put that aside and until we’re ready to come back to it. We’ve got other things, we’ve got a problem here and we can’t quite get consensus today, so we’ll just put it aside. We’ll pick this up and deal with what we can and come back to it later on.”

**McLain:** On the one hand, I get a strong sense that there seemed to be something really solid and stable that emerged in the planning year and the early years of the college that just gelled and took hold. Sort of truth with a capital T, I guess I would say.

**Hitchens:** Or very, very strong small t *truth* in italics, which is good enough in most instances because truth with a capital T really doesn’t exist unless you’re Plato and you have this idea of the forms.

**McLain:** Right, that’s what I was thinking. When we want students to do when we say, “Truth, honesty, integrity,” is to be committed to the italics with a *t*, and to be open to the fact that they can’t possess—to be truthful means that no one possesses the big T.

**Hitchens:** Yeah, and understanding that opens up lots of possibilities. There are things that work for a time, and then you discover they don’t work, or they’ve been superseded in some way or another. And



to hang on to something that's been superseded or outmoded or just proven doesn't exist . . . When I was born, that was the year that Pluto was discovered, and that was the ninth planet. In my lifetime, Pluto's gone. It's no longer a planet. Whatever it is, it's not that.

That's one of those truths that no longer exist. If you insist on hanging on—like the Flat Earth Society was, to hang on to the idea that the Earth is really flat—where does that get you in the long run? Makes you odd. It shoves you to the side of general exchange and discourse. People begin to shun you because you're that weird guy wearing the aluminum on your head to keep the aliens, or GPS, from finding out where you are.

**McLain:** There used to be a guy in Olympia, the Tin Man.

**Hitchens:** Yeah, Rocket Man. Pulled his wagon. Apparently, his house was completely lined with . . .

**McLain:** I'm thinking about this other phrase that's been kicking through my head since the last time we talked, and that's something Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said: "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but he is not entitled to his own facts." When I think about this truth, this notion, you're not saying give up on the quest because everything's relative.

**Hitchens:** No, of course not.

**McLain:** You're saying you have to be constantly open to new experience and new evidence.

**Hitchens:** Things can change. There will be new evidence that comes along and says, wait a second. It was nice to think this way for a while, but this is different than you thought. And if you hang on to the old way, it's not going to do you much good. You can hang on to things preliminarily. You can say, "This is what makes sense to me right now." That will stand you pretty well until or unless something else pops up and says, "Hey, it's different than you thought." Or, "Things have really changed, and we're no longer going to focus and say, 'This is how to define this, A, B, and C.' We've figured out a different way, or we see it differently and understand it differently or better because of this new information, this new material that allows us to see it differently." If you're not awake to that—and that requires an honest commitment to openness, and if you are carrying on things with as much integrity as possible, you'll be ready to say, "Wow, I was wrong." Or, "This is exciting. This is a new and different direction to take. I'm open to it. Let's go. Let's see where it takes us."

You roll with the punches better. It makes you a better citizen in the long run. It helps you when you're ready to cast a ballot. It helps you detect when people are lying to you—and politicians

love to lie because they figure the public probably don't know shit, so we'll just feed it to them and they'll love it.

**McLain:** They'll eat it up.

**Hitchens:** Yeah. Which means that learning—if you find yourself committed to these elements—it's a lifetime experience. You don't just learn up to noon on June 15, 2011 and that's it, get your degree and away you go. Life is full of things out there that are in existence today that did not exist back when we founded the college. The iPad, for example. If you're going to work with computers in those days, they actually had typing keys on them, and they had keyboards, and they acted like teletype machines.

**McLain:** They didn't have screens, most of them.

**Hitchens:** No, it all typed out like you were in a Western Union office and Western Union telegrams were coming in being typed out and then pasted onto the surface of something.

**McLain:** Funny you mentioned Charlie McCann earlier today and reading *The Iliad*. That's a story of craft, probably written several hundred years after events that it was trying to capture, I imagine. In your faculty interview on the Web site, you said that the distinction between what is myth—I guess I'm shifting gears here a little bit, but I'm still gravitating around this bigger question of truth—and what is history, and increasingly even the accuracy of history, is less important in terms of culture than the lessons that might be drawn from how the story gets told. Could you unpack that a little bit for me? Or, is that an unfair question to ask you on a warm afternoon?

**Hitchens:** I'm going to come at it in a roundabout way, but this is the way my brain operates sometimes. Joseph Goebbels said, "If you tell the lie often enough, it becomes truth." So, if you take the myths that people have—it started out trying to produce instant mythology for America at its founding, so he hocused up these things about George Washington—the cherry tree and "I cannot tell a lie." Or, that he threw a silver dollar across the Potomac in a year when silver dollars didn't exist. Telling those stories, he thought, would elevate us quickly to a more equal status with the older cultures/civilizations of Europe. They all had their tales and stories, so I think in his mind, he was trying to elevate Washington to the status of, say, somebody like Charlemagne. There are a lot of stories, there's a lot of this mythology about him, which is separate from the reality of who he was, and what he actually did, and how he could actually do it.

If you seize control of the structure of the myth and tweak it the way you want to, you can turn it into anything, and you can convince people, for example, that Sarah Palin is qualified to be President of the United States. Because the facts of her existence have gotten stomped by the emotion of the

mythology—"This poor little girl out of Wasilla, Alaska, trying to be Miss America. By golly, there she is. She's just like all the rest of us." "George Bush—by gawd, I think he's dumber than a stump but I can have a beer with him, so, by gawd, I'm going to vote for him."

**McLain:** Washington is somebody with common sense.

**Hitchens:** Exactly, and her ability to pooh-pooh facts, well, it goes back to Reagan.

**McLain:** There you go.

**Hitchens:** Facts are slippery things, and somehow, that stuck. That's part of what informed my comment there about if you seize the myth, and tell the story in the way that you have decided it needs to go, you can control it and control its impact.

**McLain:** On the other hand, if you can find a way to avoid the myth—for instance, give people back their humanity, in the case of Washington—you end up with something much richer and more complex, and ultimately more edifying.

**Hitchens:** But it's so sticky because he owned slaves. Same thing with Jefferson. Texas has decided that the way they're going to deal with Jefferson, they're just going to write him out of all the textbooks because he was a slaveowner, and they don't even want to talk about slavery. You've got to deal with it, warts and all. Maybe warts are more interesting ultimately, and more important in the long run, than anything else. That's what I've always tried to do with my work, get people thinking about, well, this sounds pretty good, so what's the problem? Is it too good? Is it too slick? If it is, then it's probably not very real, and if it's not very real, you've got to be suspicious of it. You want leadership that will just flat out lie to you?

As I think I mentioned, when John Stewart was talking about that he'd interviewed Donald Rumsfeld, and he was talking about how the whole WMD business had gotten sold to the American people; that Iraq represented a danger because of this whole story, and how it was sold. Rumsfeld said, "No, not sold. Presented." Presentation—I hate to say, "Gawd, Rumsfeld and I agree about something." That's the same point that's embedded there, impacted in my commentary. That was a few years before Rummy started running things. People forget that these folks were all connected. Rummy and Cheney. They all go back to Nixon and managed to resurrect themselves when Reagan got into office. Boy, they just moved right in and started elbowing their way through, and there they are.

**McLain:** It seems that the main driving myth through American history has been, I guess what I would call the myth of American exceptionalism.

**Hitchens:** It's a belief more than a myth. When the Puritans arrived in Massachusetts, arriving with their tails tucked between their legs, the leadership said, "Wait a second. Here's our opportunity."

**McLain:** To make it all up.

**Hitchens:** "Here's our chance to construct life the way we've been talking about, and we can show everybody back in England how to do it. Here we go." They had no idea that things were going to change, and there was going to be a revolution, and Cromwell was going to come in. That also cut, for a significant amount of time, very clear communication between North America and England, leaving the folks in and around Massachusetts Bay on their own, and increasingly having to sort out how to deal with their neighbors. Out of that emerged the sort of Puritanism that we associate with the Salem witch trials and Cotton Mather, and all those folks.

**McLain:** "Sinners in the hands of an angry God."

**Hitchens:** But it's all based upon the exceptionalism that is inherent in Calvinism. If you are of the elect, there's nothing you can do that will deny you a spot in heaven. You're predestined, from before you were born, from the day God created the Earth, when your time comes and you've lived out your span, you go directly to the Pearly Gates and collect your halo, and you get the other stuff that you get when they equip you, and away you go.

One of the things that happened was people went "Oh, then we can do anything we want to." Calvin said, "No, no. That's not what I meant. That's not what's embedded in this. If you are of the elect, and predestined for heaven, you will be consumed with a fiery driving energy to do good and be good. As a consequence, God will reward you. You will have a comfortable existence in this life before you move on to the next."

So, Puritans began to make money and they said, "Ah, this is evidence of God's favor. We're going to make it. Here we go." No Puritan, other than John Calvin—and maybe Cotton Mather, although there's some indication after he had been one of the judges in the Salem witch trials, he went back and said, "We made some mistakes"—the only Puritan who ever knew for sure that he was 100 percent right in his conviction and his understanding was John Calvin, who, when he ran the Republic of Virtue in Geneva—and people were condemned to die, to be burnt at the stake as heretics—would stand there and pray that God would heat the fire hotter and hotter so that they would have a sense of the terrible flames they were going to experience when they hit hell. Really nice guy.

He also said, "The important thing is that you can't trust people, because they don't know for sure, so you've got to have good institutions to control them"—to control their appetites, to control

their desires, their wants, their needs. That created, for example, in Connecticut, there was as late as 1958—maybe a little later—I don't know if it's still on the books because I've never taken the time to try to look it up—there was a law on the books that if you were a recalcitrant teenager and refused to obey your parents three times, you could be put to death after the third time.

**McLain:** Pretty draconian.

**Hitchens:** You bet. But that was how they had laws to control people.

**McLain:** Are they the same impulses that influenced the creation of divided government, in terms of power not being concentrated in the hands of any one institution, or is that a different political philosophy coming through?

**Hitchens:** It's a different political philosophy because it's based upon the idea of the social contract. The contract theory of government is fundamentally different because it says that a legitimate government draws its legitimacy from the people who have willingly entered into the contract. At some point in our past, we agreed we would, in exchange for security—Hobbs believed it was security to begin with—we would obey the law. We would give our collective power these authorities.

**McLain:** It required an individual's assent to the contract in that regard.

**Hitchens:** If you look at the American Revolution, the fundamental thing that seemed to be there was the colonies got together and they elected a representative body from their own ranks, which becomes the First Continental Congress, and they talked through. When what they came up with in the First and Second Continental Congress wasn't working under the Articles of Confederation, they consciously shifted gears, sent people to Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 to create the Constitution. The Preamble to the Constitution lays it all out: "We, the people of the United States"—this is our purpose—"in order to form a more perfect union, to provide for the common defense, and to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity do hereby decree and ordain this Constitution of the United States."

That's an amazingly open, clear document. That's the kind of openness and clarity, I think, at least for me, was behind what I thought we were doing when we constructed Evergreen. We made conscious decisions, we created an institution that would function and would challenge us to produce the best of our abilities and made certain promises. You wouldn't have to worry about the same kinds of things you worried about if you were at Brand X.

We'd be open about helping each other try to become better teachers. How do we do that? We evaluated each other. We spent a year in one program, having faculty seminars, and experiencing learning from each other. I can't speak for everybody's that's been on the faculty, but it really worked for me. I milked my colleagues. I learned all sorts of stuff from them that I never would have been able to do or would have achieved in terms of understanding the fundamentals of how economists really think and operate, and what people are onto when they're studying anthropology, what anthropologists are doing, and the different kinds of things that anthropologists actually do. Coming to understand relativity better because I had the chance to work with Tom Grissom. I learned from one of the best minds I've ever encountered in my life as a consequence.

Those things, that's what we were hoping for. That's what I ended up milking—maybe very selfishly on some levels—my opportunities because of what I realized I could learn from my colleagues. I hoped that I was, in turn, giving them things that would be useful and important to them. And taking this new knowledge and looking at things from different ways—looking at things from an anthropological point of view, or an economist's point of view.

As I looked back at what I thought I understood about our history, it helped me to see that differently, or helped me to suddenly say, "Ah, wait a minute. Here's something I can put this together and this together and present it to students and say, 'Think about this. You don't have to buy this. You can reject it, but you're going to have to think about it, you're going to have to mull it over, you're going to have to see whether or not it makes sense to you, because here's how it's different than this. You can read this book and this book and this book, and they're going to tell you the same things. But you look at it from this point of view and you add this stuff and it looks like this over here. What makes sense to you? You make that decision. I don't make that decision. I've already made certain decisions, and I'm presenting things in this way, and I'm doing it openly. I'm not saying you have to buy this. You can't mindlessly accept what I tell you because I might be lying to you.'"

**McLain:** And I'm not going to give you a good grade if you just parrot back what I said.

**Hitchens:** Exactly. You don't get plus points.

**McLain:** You had a lot of chances over 41 years to work with a lot of great colleagues. But it seemed like you had a handful that you really built a longstanding collegial relationship with. Cross disciplines.

**Hitchens:** I suspect I'm not that unusual among the faculty. I suspect that there are folks who have worked with other people and developed significant relationships, both intellectually and on outright friendship basis.

**McLain:** But there's something really special about being able to do that that you'd never get at a regular university.

**Hitchens:** No, because at a university, you're solo all the time. You're inside your department. But you're the early twentieth century man, or you're the French historian, or you're the ancient classicist of whatever. Nobody challenges you. They might come to you and seek your insight on something, but they're not going to say, "Wait a minute. Is this the only way to look at this?"

The idea that somebody trained in history could learn something useful from reading *The Iliad* because it abounds with material that helps you better understand what Greek society was all about, and what the Greeks were concerned with in terms of how to do the good, that's what literary folks do.

**McLain:** That's the approach I took when I was going my master's degree in the New Testament. I'm reading the Gospel of Mark as a work of literature and saying, "This is a document that was crafted in a time in history. What does it tell us about these human beings at this time? It's not what it tells us ostensibly about God or Jesus or not, but what does it tell us about these human beings who had these experiences or these beliefs?"

**Hitchens:** Or, how they reacted to what they were hearing.

**McLain:** Or, how one person chose to represent that myth, and put that myth forward. Very interesting.

**Hitchens:** Because what the first Gospel appears about 100 years after.

**McLain:** More like 40 or 50.

**Hitchens:** Oh, is it that close?

**McLain:** We have Paul who appears within about 15 years of Jesus dying, maybe 20. Then Mark I think between 65 and 70. It's still long enough, and in those days, there was no recording equipment, so it's a little bit like trying to figure out what happened in an auto accident 40 years later. You've got one story here, one story there.

**Hitchens:** And you're at the mercy of the memory, if there is—

**McLain:** And the telephoning that goes on as the stories get passed.

**Hitchens:** That's one reason why something like *The Iliad* is interesting, because when Homer—or whichever blind poet—arrived in town to sing it, it ran five days. It ran a full week.

**McLain:** It's like committing to the *Ring Cycle* or something.

**Hitchens:** Yeah, and it was a community experience because they were there to learn and to hear how the story reinforced how to do the good, and what you're supposed to do in relative terms, where anger can lead you if you're not careful. And that you'd better watch out for the gods because they play with you. You can't always trust them, because look what happened. The gods ended up on the battlefield literally fighting each other physically because they had taken sides over what was going on around Troy.

There's another thing Charlie McCann raised. He said, "Why did they do that?" [laughter] Or, "Why is Homer having them do that?" I said, "Because it was a complicated issue, and this is one way that he reminded people that it can be so complicated that the very gods themselves choose up sides, and that leads them to being dumbass humans."

**McLain:** There's that great line in Lincoln's Second Inaugural—you can tell I'm a little bit of a Lincoln-phile—where he talked about "both pray to the same God and invoke his hate against the other." That complicated little war.

**Hitchens:** Same thing, one of the things they did in *The Longest Day* at the beginning when the Germans are waking up to find that the fleet's there, this one German says, "Whose side is God on?" Because they had God vigilance. At that point, he's now completely puzzled. I thought that was kind of an interesting little thing to appear at the beginning of this effort.

**McLain:** I haven't seen that movie in a long time. I did watch *Saving Private Ryan* recently again.

**Hitchens:** What did you think after?

**McLain:** It's mostly an endurance contest, but I thought it was the most realistic war movie I'd ever seen in terms of battle sequences. I think there are stronger movies that take a more neutral stance on war and the "Whose side is God on?" I definitely felt like there was a good guys/bad guys feel to this whole thing. What did you think of it?

**Hitchens:** I felt like Hanks's involvement in *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* produced better overall things. For example, in one of the segments of *Band of Brothers*, they literally recreate an assault that this sergeant put together on a German position that is still being taught by the Army War College. It became a classic, and they recreated that. Then they talked about it a little bit later on. You could actually look at it and say, "Wait a minute. What else were they true to in terms of demonstrating things?" They also showed how the campaigns had worn on the people themselves. The guy that's such a drunk, and he gets worse and worse.



**McLain:** You get more of a sense of the long-term cost.

**Hitchens:** Yes, and if you watched *The Pacific*, by focusing on the three memoirs that they did, they could focus on three lives, but place them in those situations that they had experienced that were real. Also show how people around them were affected. Whathisname, who was Leckie, they put him in with the crazies to show him he ain't crazy and they know that. Then he realizes "I've got to get out of here."

But he bumps into people that he knows who have crossed over. The guy who wins the Medal of Honor has to go back and ends up dying on Iwo Jima, knowing that that was going to happen to him, but he couldn't go run around selling War Bonds. He'd fallen in love. I thought that that's the thing. By focusing on the reality of the lives of people who were survivors provides a dimension that *Saving Private Ryan* cannot. It can give you moments where you get a hint of things, but that's different from seeing one guy who's getting ready to give in to the urge to pull gold out of the mouths of dead Japanese, and the guy who's sitting up there saying, "Don't do it. I've done it and the doc told us you can get infections and your arm will rot off and things like that."

There's a moment when one of the guys in *Saving Private Ryan* is doing hand-to-hand combat and he's losing, and the German's got him with the bayonet—the German's going "Shhhh." That touches on some of that humanity. It's a peek, it's a hint, but when you've got a guy peeing in the open skull of a dead Japanese soldier, that's a whole different [thing].

**McLain:** These are HBO series?

**Hitchens:** Yeah.

**McLain:** I'm going to have to check those out.

**Hitchens:** You can get them on Netflix. Do you have Comcast?

**McLain:** I do have Comcast.

**Hitchens:** Check their On Demand. They sometimes have those sitting there. I did see that *The Pacific* is going to be for sale on Blu-Ray and DVD here around Father's Day. It's powerful. This year, we used *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*—I just blocked his name, Marine Corps veteran, Eugene Sledge, as one of the memoirs used in *The Pacific*. It went over real well. Up to this year, we'd used Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, which is stark enough in lots of ways.

**McLain:** That's the one where the publishers made him change "fuck" to "fug."

**Hitchens:** Yeah. He got introduced to Tallulah Bankhead at a cocktail party. “Miss Bankhead, this is Norman Mailer, the author of *The Naked and the Dead*.” She looked at him and she said, “Oh, you’re that young man who can’t spell fuck properly.” [laughter]

**McLain:** That’s great. I’m wondering, do you have any heroes?

**Hitchens:** Do I have heroes? I think maybe as a trained historian, I’ve seen and I’ve come to understand something about the careers of some of the people that have preceded me that I’ve come to admire aspects of them. Charles Beard, when he raised the issues when he wrote *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, pointed out that these were rich guys who all had a general bank balance of about five grand at a time when that meant a whole lot. He ends up losing his position at Columbia because people are just aghast. He laid things out. He said, “If you don’t believe me, here are the sources. Go look at them yourself and see if you don’t reach the same conclusion.”

**McLain:** He took on the myth.

**Hitchens:** Well, some of those folks. But I guess my major hero as a historian is Thucydides, who’s generally accorded to be the father of real history. Herodotus collected stories and things, but Herodotus wasn’t real careful about [his sources]—he bought just what they told him. “This is what the Egyptians told me about this, that and the other.”

**McLain:** He didn’t check his facts.

**Hitchens:** No. But Thucydides is a cashiered general. He had lost his position as a leader of men and was washed out. The Peloponnesian War is still going on, and Thucydides is sitting there looking at his society, looking at his beloved city state, and saying, “We’re losing. What happened, and why? What kind of mistakes have we made?” Because he had the idea—as so many Athenians had—that they were superior to other folks who were nominally Greek, but they weren’t Athenian. Spartans, they’re kind of an embarrassment and they do things completely differently, and here they are kicking our ass in the Peloponnesian War. How can that be?

So, Thucydides sat down and said, “We need to understand the nature of the mistakes that we’re living with the consequences of. Where did they come from? How did they get made? What kinds of decisions got made? What can we learn from this? If we understand the story clearly, based on the best evidence that we have, and it tells us how things happened, we can avoid those mistakes in the future. We may make different mistakes.”

He didn't have the idea that you could work out laws of history that would help prevent you from doing dumbass things. But his major thing was we can learn from these mistakes, we can learn from the past, and if we make other mistakes, they will be different mistakes. They won't be the same mistakes that got us into this problem in the first place. Hence, that was his approach. That's why he told the story of the Peloponnesian War the way he did, and in effect, set up a model that I think is still good for anybody who wants to study and understand history. Find out what the mistakes were, what they consisted of, how decisions that got made that produced those mistakes, and then try not to do them again. Ho ho ho.

We live in a society that doesn't pay attention to its history. Because we don't pay attention to our history, we keep making the same mistakes over and over again, thinking we're doing things differently because we're exceptional. We're going to show those folks over there across the waters this "shining city on the hill." What becomes a belief has morphed into a kind of mythology about American exceptionalism, and that doesn't help us if it's going to get us stuck in constantly, like a broken record . . . We don't have broken records any longer. [laughter]

**McLain:** You dated yourself now, but I think the metaphor still holds.

**Hitchens:** There's still that click click click. We could sit around and scratch our heads and say, "We did this, and we did that, just like we did here." Or, that statement that I heard at the beginning of when troops were committed to Iraq, "This is not going to be like Vietnam." No, of course not. It couldn't be because the climate is completely different, the landscape is completely different.

**McLain:** The culture on the ground is completely different.

**Hitchens:** Yeah, and there's a religious element there lurking in the background that wasn't there so much with Vietnam. But it's just like Vietnam because we got sucked into this quagmire of things for all the wrong reasons, and we got lied to in the same way that we got lied to about the Bay of Pigs, or we got lied to about the Gulf of Tonkin, and the vestiges of the Cold War and they mythology that emerged from that. We say, "How come we're still . . .? Golly." And we've committed how many zillion dollars since 2003?

**McLain:** I don't know. It's a lot.

**Hitchens:** It's a lot. It's enough to the point where we're broke.

**McLain:** The other day at the campus, in preparation for Memorial Day, they staged a reading of all of the names of American servicepeople who were killed since 2003. They started at 7:30 and it took them until quarter to 6:00 in the evening to finish. Nonstop.

**Hitchens:** That reminds me. When people were carrying the candles walking in front of the White House when Nixon was there, they walked by and called out the name of one individual who died in Vietnam.

**McLain:** As I was hearing the names, for some reason what was coming to mind was a different house for each person where there was a different family that they each came from.

**Hitchens:** Yes, of course.

**McLain:** Different circumstances, different towns.

**Hitchens:** And relatives that are still being affected by their loss. There was an interesting thing that Kevin Bacon did for HBO. It was about escorting a dead Marine home—coming back from Iraq or Afghanistan, I'm not sure which—and escorting the body to his hometown. I'm trying to remember the [name]. It was out a couple years back. It'll come to me at 3:00 in the morning. I'll try to get word to you so you can know. It's a short title. [transcriber found *Taking Chance*]

But Bacon plays either a major or a lieutenant colonel who steps in. He made it through Desert Storm and he's back. He's now in an office, flying a desk, and decides to volunteer for escort duty to escort this young, dead Marine back to his family in Montana. Very interesting. Nicely done.

**McLain:** Do you have any feelings about being an emeritus faculty member? It's probably all over but the shouting at this point.

**Hitchens:** I guess it's too early to have sunk in. I'm kind of humbled by it all. I wrote up a little thing that I gave to Tom Rainey to read on my behalf to the Trustees. Very short. This may surprise you, but the thing that I found myself pondering, and hoping that the answers to questions around it would be positive, was a thing that I never have forgotten. I was hired by the taxpayers of the State of Washington to provide something to their children. I've always had a sense that somewhere in the back of what's going on is somebody's paying for this, so the taxpayers of Washington, in their wisdom, create a State government that decided to provide State funding for education at all levels—this happens to be higher learning. So, I've had a responsibility to the taxpayers of Washington to turn out to be a good investment for them. I hope I have been. I hope that I have fulfilled my side of the contract, just as the State of Washington has fulfilled its side of the contract with me.

As a consequence, as I'm headed out the door, I'm very humbled because the Trustees have decided to accept the recommendation of my colleagues that I should have emeritus status. I hope I've earned it.

**McLain:** I'm pretty sure you have.

**Hitchens:** Well, as you may have figured out by now, I'm not a personal drummer.

**McLain:** I've noticed.

**Hitchens:** I'm much happier to see former students having good success, because I've already had mine. I got to somehow or another live a life of the mind that got triggered, in terms of my love of history, by that moment in the library of the University of Tulsa the week after I had turned 17, in the fall of 1956. Wow! How many people can say that? I suspect not too many.

I've gotten paid, after a while, to do the thing that I love, perhaps most in all the world. I don't know how else to express it. I'm really grateful for that opportunity. As I said, I like to think that it was a two-way street, and that I returned good value for the investment that [unintelligible 01:24:31] made in me, and that I'm leaving something behind that also has continued value and importance into the future. Because Evergreen is going to continue to exist. I don't think it will ever completely blow away its founding principles, probably because they're complicated enough that not everybody understands them. [laughter]

**McLain:** And they have their own momentum. That's a beautiful thing.

**Hitchens:** Yeah. It's a place where people can arrive and look around and go "What? Wow! Look at that. Imagine this. I had no idea." That feels pretty good.

I hope I've also done my colleagues on the planning faculty proud, because I got to work with some fascinating brains, and got to participate in helping shape something that I wasn't so sure was going to work. We sort of put it out there and waited.

**McLain:** You strike me as one of the more—how do I want to put this?—I'll just lay it out—one of the more normal ones. It was quite an eccentric group of guys that got together—personalities, interests.

**Hitchens:** Yeah, we were very diverse. From where I sit, the most normal of us was Byron Youtz.

**McLain:** Yeah.

**Hitchens:** Which is kind of interesting, because I think Youtz is one of the preachers' kids.

**McLain:** There were a few of those.

**Hitchens:** Rudy Martin was a preacher's kid.

**McLain:** Yeah.

**Hitchens:** Merv Cadwallader was a preacher's kid.

**McLain:** Rainey wasn't a planning faculty, but he came and he was a preacher's kid, wasn't he?

**Hitchens:** No, he wasn't a preacher's kid. He had heavy-duty religionists in his family.

**McLain:** Maybe that's what I was thinking of. But there were a lot of preachers' kids among you guys.

**Hitchens:** But we also had a couple of misfits, and I don't know how they survived the planning year. They survived on into the early stages but didn't stick around. It was weird.

**McLain:** They never quite gelled.

**Hitchens:** Bob Barnard and Jack Webb are the two that I'm thinking of who just didn't—as I mentioned about Barnard, because he'd won some national award as a Educator of the Year in chemistry—decided he was going to move into multimedia things about chemistry. He was busy wanting to order a quarter of a million dollars' worth of equipment and build his own empire. He just didn't have that sense of fitting.

Jack Webb was my officemate in the planning year. I think he was a preacher's kid. I'm not positive, but I think there was something there, or he had studied in the seminary for a while or something. I don't know what it was exactly. He had this kind of weird laugh, and his efforts at humor were always to the side of whatever else was going on. He just ended up irritating people, so people wouldn't pay attention to him. We would sit and we would talk about things in the office. I tried to help him see things. But then what happened was his wife, Mary, developed a brain tumor and she ended up dying. That spun him out into directions that he couldn't come back from, so he left.

Fred Young, who was very interesting, was older. He was maybe the oldest of the planning faculty. Mathematician. He had some really interesting ideas about how to try to meld mathematics in with the humanities and social sciences, and may have been a more significant contributor in the early days, except during our second year—our first year with students—he was on sabbatical, and he died of a heart attack suddenly. So, he's the forgotten member of the planning faculty.

Fred Tabbutt was only quarter time. He gets credit for being on the planning faculty, but he wasn't here when we were doing the 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. meeting days and things like that. I suspect if he was to sit down and to write a reflection or something about the planning year, it would sound very different from mine or Rudy's or anybody who was right here on the ground doing everything that we

had to do. While we were doing that, we also went through 15,000 applications for the next 45 faculty positions for people to join us.

**McLain:** Fifteen thousand? Wow.

**Hitchens:** Fifteen thousand. There were 4,000 applications for the planning faculty and 15,000 for our opening year with students. We also helped Admissions go through student applications as well. So, when we weren't out on the road recruiting students, we were in reading faculty files and student essays, things of that sort, to try to help put the school together so we'd have a range of folks in the student body to help make it work, because we had to have students. But we were interested in students who could have graduated last in their class, [but] if they had good letters of support for why they deserved a chance, we'd look very closely at them. We let two or three in who were wildly successful.

And we had people who had been at four or five different institutions and hadn't been satisfied with their experience to that point, who ended up applying and getting accepted to be part of the first batch of students.

**McLain:** Especially in those early years, the students brought a kind of maturity in years even. There were a lot of folks who were older. The average age was quite high for an undergraduate institution.

**Hitchens:** One individual who represents that very well is Rita Pougiales.

**McLain:** Yeah.

**Hitchens:** She was in my first program. I think she was in Dave Marr's seminar, either Dave Marr or Betty Ruth Estes. She wasn't in my group or Kirk's Thompson's group, as I recall. She'd been at several other places. Found a home here, and then went to graduate school.

**McLain:** Came back.

**Hitchens:** She's been here ever since.

**McLain:** Was she one of the first to do that?

**Hitchens:** Yeah. Tom Womeldorff is another one who went off and managed to get back.

**McLain:** Nancy Koppelman.

**Hitchens:** Yeah. Nancy worked as Gail Martin's secretary, and I guess was taking work on the side, taking advantage of the staff tuition waiver for up to eight hours per quarter and earn credit. She was able to use that.

**McLain:** She also got an MA in history, I think, while she was working with Gail.

**Hitchens:** Yeah.

**McLain:** Up at the UW.

**Hitchens:** Then earned her doctorate in American studies.

**McLain:** Dave, you've been very generous with me. Thank you.

**Hitchens:** You think you got enough?

**McLain:** I think I have a lot. [laughing] I'm not sure where we would go from here, but if something came up, could I call you?

**Hitchens:** You bet. I was just about to tell you if, as you're sitting down and organizing things, if something pops up, you may call, I'll do my best.

**McLain:** And you let me know how you're feeling physically, too, so there's nothing urgent or anything on my part. If you're not feeling well, just tell me.