

Sharon (Shary) Smith
Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal
The Evergreen State College oral history project
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FINAL

Fiksdal: This is Susan Fiksdal with Shary Smith on September 16, 2022. Shary, we're going to talk a little bit first about your childhood and growing up and where you come from. You can just start wherever you'd like.

Smith: I was born in Dawson, Minnesota. My mother was from Dawson. My father was a flight instructor during the war at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. She went home to be with her mother and my aunt to have me.

Right before I was born, my father borrowed an airplane from the Air Force and flew to Dawson, Minnesota, to my grandfather's farm and landed in a cornfield so that he could be there at my birth.

After I was born, my mother stayed there in Dawson, Minnesota, until I was nine months old. Then she and I joined my father in Texas. He was an airplane pilot instructor in the Air Force. Jack Dempsey carried me on the airplane for my mother.

Fiksdal: My goodness.

Smith: If you're an older person, you know who Jack Dempsey was. [laughing]

Fiksdal: You'd better explain it.

Smith: Jack Dempsey was a prizefighter. They moved to South Bay in Olympia, Washington, when I was nine months old. I was raised here in Olympia. My father's mother, sister, aunt, and great grandfather also lived in Olympia.

I have one sister who's 17 months younger. She was born in Olympia. I have a brother who was six years younger. When I was six years old, we moved to the Westside of Olympia. I was raised on Conger Street where a lot of Evergreen students have lived. [laughter] I went to Garfield Elementary School, Jefferson Junior High, and Olympia High School.

Fiksdal: You still live on the Westside of Olympia.

Smith: I still live on the Westside.

Fiksdal: That's terrific, since I did, too. We have talked about that a little bit. In high school, were you thinking about college, or did your parents encourage you to go to college?

Smith: No. When I was in high school, my friends would talk about going to college and I would just walk away out of the conversation. I don't remember my parents ever mentioning it. I wasn't groomed for it. I didn't have anyone to marry when I was a senior in high school and I didn't know what I was going to do.

But my friends were talking about college, and I thought, why don't I go to college? I asked my father, "Where can I go to college?" [laughing] He said, "Montana."

Fiksdal: Montana?

Smith: Because he was raised in Billings. My mom and my dad drove me to Billings to Montana State in Bozeman, Montana. The drive to Bozeman was so special because I was their only child in the car, and I always wanted to be an only child. [laughter]

We got to Bozeman, and I met my new roommate, and I loved her. My mom and dad kissed me goodbye, and I said, "Where are you going?" I was not prepared for them to leave me. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Had they gone to college?

Smith: My father went to Linfield College. He went two years. He was the editor of the newspaper, and he said something that they didn't like, and they kicked him out.

Fiksdal: Oh, my gosh!

Smith: My father was very intelligent, and I guess he had a mouth, and he thought he should write this whatever it was, and they said, "We don't allow that. You're gone."

Fiksdal: But I can't believe they kicked him out of college.

Smith: They kicked him out of college. He never went back. He didn't finish his college education. My mother was a soloist, a soprano, and wanted to go to Gustavus Adolphus in Minneapolis. Her heart was set on that.

But her brothers got to go to college and the girls didn't. There were two boys and two girls in her family, and she was not one that got to go to college because she was a female. She worked in a theater, and that's as close as she got to being a professional singer was just work in a theater.

Fiksdal: So, you knew this when you went to college.

Smith: Yes.

Fiksdal: How long did you stay in Bozeman?

Smith: I stayed in Bozeman one year. I was homesick. I would call crying all the time. "Please come and see me. Please come and get me." [laughing]

Fiksdal: Excuse me. How long were you in Bozeman?

Smith: I was there one year. I loved Bozeman, but I just wasn't ready, so I came back to Olympia. I came back home and then I went to the University of Washington. I was in a sorority house there, Pi Beta Phi, which saved my life because I had never been treated to be independent. Living in a sorority house was wonderful. I loved my sisters. I loved my house mother. We had rules. We had to be in at night.

Fiksdal: It was a much larger university also.

Smith: Yes, it was much larger.

Fiksdal: That gave you a place to be.

Smith: I also had a place in Montana, but I just wasn't ready, so I moved to the University of Washington. My third year there, I had appendicitis. I was really sick, so I came home, missed school, missed participating in school, and never went back. Then what? Then what was I going to do?

Fiksdal: Your third year, you must have had a major.

Smith: I didn't have a major. I had no idea what to do. I just was not ready. I was recuperating—and this is a funny story. My roommate from Montana contacted me. Asked me if I would go to SeaTac to pick up something she had shipped out here, and I don't know why she shipped it to Seattle and not Billings, where she was from. That's the piece I just can't remember.

My mother and I were very close. We were best friends. I said, "Do you want to go to SeaTac? I've got to pick up Marian's luggage." She goes, "Sure." So, we went to the wrong place. We went to a warehouse where I thought the luggage from Europe would come.

We went into this small office, and I said, "I'm here to pick up this luggage." They said, "You're in the wrong office." I go, "Oh, okay." But he said, "By the way, this is the United Airlines recruitment office. Would you like to be a stewardess?" [laughter] I said, "No, I'm here to pick up luggage." My mother is saying, "Shary, that would be so much fun." I said, "No, Mom. I don't want to do that." She said, "Why?" I said, "I don't know. I just don't want to do that. I don't know what I want to do."

He said, "Basically, you don't even have to go through the process. Just sign this, fill this out and think about it." The next thing I knew, I was in Chicago in United Airlines flight stewardess training.

[laughter]

Fiksdal: Did they pay for it?

Smith: Yes, it was all paid for.

Fiksdal: That is really funny.

Smith: My mom went with me. There was a graduation, where you'd bring your parents, so my mother was there. They assigned me my domicile in Chicago. I got an apartment with other stewardesses in the "stew zoo" and I flew for a year.

Fiksdal: Did you go abroad?

Smith: No, United didn't go abroad. Just in the United States. And mostly, when you're new and there's thousands of stewardesses in the same area, you go to South Bend, Indiana, Newark, Cleveland. These were some of the cities I flew into.

Fiksdal: Nowhere interesting.

Smith: I did go to New York. They didn't go into Florida. Seattle, the West Coast. But most of my flights were to Cleveland. I did that for a year, and then I got married.

Fiksdal: To a pilot let me guess?

Smith: No, I got married to a civil engineer that was just finishing up at Notre Dame. He was finishing his master's degree, but he was in the military—ROTC. The military pays for your graduate school and when you graduate, you go into the military.

Fiksdal: I see.

Smith: We lived in South Bend, Indiana until he graduated. I took classes at St. Mary's of Notre Dame. He had about six months or a year left of his requirement. Then we were sent off to Germany. We lived in Germany four years and had a baby. Got a dog. Then I came back here, and he went to Vietnam.

Fiksdal: Oh, my gosh.

Smith: I decided I needed to divorce him. It was not a good match. My little girl and I moved here, moved home. After a year of recuperating from all that, I got a job at Evergreen. I went to the personnel Office and spoke with Charen Blankenship and I became friends with her. Charen and I clicked. She got me a job as a file clerk in the Business Office. That was in 1973. I filed student records. A year later I worked for Ken Winkley as his secretary.

Fiksdal: This is where I get very excited. I want you to try to remember what Evergreen was like in 1973. You had to walk across campus to get to your job. Our parking lot was pretty far away. So, you would see students, even though in your job you were in an office all the time. What were your impressions when you even went out there for the job, and then when you accepted? How did you feel about the place?

Smith: It's interesting. When I first got out there, it was like a State office. I hadn't understood it. It was a job in the Registrar's Office, where I did filing, and I was terrible at it. I was barely earning enough money to pay my rent, take care of my daughter.

The longer I worked there, I realized that isn't what I want to do. I was meeting students. I hadn't met faculty. The staff were like people I would have met in any State office. Everybody looked like they worked in a State office.

But when I started to branch out a little bit, my daughter was in daycare. That was different. I was from such a straight, conservative family, and the kids in the daycare were dressed differently than she was. She was all dressed up.

I started to see something different, and then I took a class. That's where my life changed. That's where the magic happened. That's where I finally felt like I belonged. It was what I needed my whole life.

Fiksdal: Do you remember that first class?

Smith: Yeah. It was Life and Health with Don Humphrey, David Peterson, Sig Kutter, Peta Henderson, Rainier Hasenstab, and Randall Phillips.

Fiksdal: What about the names of your next program?

Smith: Health: Individual and Community with Russ Fox, Oscar Soule, Linda Kahn, and Lem Stepherson.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Smith: They were both similar in certain ways, and I just felt like, this is it. This is it.

Fiksdal: Wow. Was your daughter in the daycare at Evergreen?

Smith: Yeah.

Fiksdal: Oh, that explains that.

Smith: I can't remember if the staff was invited to take classes, if they paid for classes, if they helped people. I can't remember how I got into class.

Fiksdal: I know that you were allowed as many credits as you could do and still do your job fulltime for free.

Smith: That must be what happened then. I was fulltime.

Fiksdal: You were fulltime, but then you still had your job?

Smith: Maybe I quit my job.

Fiksdal: You must have quit. Because fulltime would not have been—because they met during the day and your work was during the day.

Smith: Yeah, I couldn't figure out how I did that. On the other hand, I got food stamps, so maybe—

Fiksdal: You went on welfare.

Smith: I don't remember getting money, I remember getting food stamps. Maybe my parents helped me out. They were hands off for a lot of it because I think they wanted me to grow up. I'd been on my own for a long time, but—

Fiksdal: You had a daughter. That's pretty grown up.

Smith: Yeah, and I'd had a job across the country, and I'd been in Europe. Anyway, I was fulltime. I remember the faculty that first year saying, "Okay, Shary, we're going to write this paper on that," and I go, "I can't do that. I don't know how to do it." They'd look at me like I was crazy. "I don't know how to do that. I don't know how to write. I've never written anything."

They wanted me to do something else at school. "I can't do that." They'd say, "Yes, you can." And there was the turning point. It was miraculous. I transformed.

Fiksdal: Because they told you you could do it.

Smith: They were amazing. They saw something in me I sure didn't see, and I finally started to believe them. Slowly, I'd do the work. I didn't think I was very good at it, but I did it. They just kept at it.

Fiksdal: Your evaluations must have shown you that you were pretty smart.

Smith: I guess. I just was not academically inclined. I had no background in that.

Fiksdal: And yet, you enrolled, so something was going on there with you.

Smith: Something was going on. I tried. I also took a class at St. Mary's in Notre Dame. I think the biggest problem in my education before was I was bored silly. I just didn't like it. They wanted me to memorize. I still can't memorize. I thought, I hate this. I hate this memorizing. And at my class at Evergreen, I didn't have to memorize. I had to think. That was the huge change.

Fiksdal: Seminars must have really meant a lot to you.

Smith: Oh, they were wonderful.

Fiksdal: That's, of course, what I studied at Evergreen, so I gave you a leading question there.

Smith: What did you study?

Fiksdal: I recorded seminars starting in 1990, and then studied them as a linguist, and then I wrote a book about that.

Smith: Have you really? I'd love to read it.

Fiksdal: I'd be happy to lend you a copy, or it's in the library. Good, so it was seminars and people encouraging you for the first time.

Smith: Yes.

Fiksdal: Then they know you really well is the thing, so that must have been a change as well.

Smith: It was a huge change.

Fiksdal: Do you remember the other students? Were you the same age? You had to have been older.

Smith: I was, as I recall, mostly always older.

Fiksdal: Do you remember how old you were when you took that first class?

Smith: Heather would be four. She was born in '70. I would have been 29. So, I was in my early thirties.

Fiksdal: But that wasn't an issue for you, I'm sure, because students were all ages then.

Smith: It seemed like I was the oldest. I could feel it. Yeah, I think I could feel it.

Fiksdal: You clearly had a lot more experience and you had a child, which makes a big difference. What else about that first year do you remember? You must have really hated that filing job. [laughter]

Smith: I did.

Fiksdal: That's one reason to change.

Smith: I also worked for the Business Director, Ken Winkley. Ken Winkley really like me, and he wanted me to be his secretary, and I thought, you have no idea what you're getting yourself in for because I can't even file. And I was a terrible typist. I would make mistakes, and it was the old typewriter. I'd type too fast and make mistakes. If I would slow down, it would be okay. I had typing and shorthand in high school. Did you?

Fiksdal: I had typing.

Smith: I had shorthand.

Fiksdal: My dad made me do it. I had to go to summer school. It was terrible. But back then, they didn't think we could do anything except being a secretary.

Smith: Yeah, we were going to be a secretary.

Fiksdal: And then we were going to get married anyway.

Smith: Exactly.

Fiksdal: We wouldn't work.

Smith: Exactly.

Fiksdal: Except, of course, we did.

Smith: We did. Things changed. I forgot your question.

Fiksdal: I was just trying to jog your memory about how you got to that first class, but let's skip that part for now. At Evergreen, it was probably 1972 or so?

Smith: I got back to Olympia in '72, and in '73, I got my job at Evergreen. This would have been '74 that I started taking classes. After I was Ken Winkley's secretary, that lasted probably six months. [laughing]

He was so good to me. He just looked the other way when I couldn't find something, but I wasn't good for him. I loved him, but I couldn't do the job.

Fiksdal: No. That's probably when you decided to just go back to school.

Smith: I think it was. It wasn't working. I was not making enough money anyway.

Fiksdal: And you didn't have too much more to go. You'd been in your third year at the University of Washington.

Smith: I had two years to go. That was credit-wise. So, when I was ready to graduate at Evergreen, I said, "Please don't let me graduate. I don't want to leave." I was just so happy there. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Oh, you were just the model student. It's what we all want to hear.

Smith: I just did not want to leave.

Fiksdal: Because you fell in love with learning.

Smith: Oh, I did. That was the romance of my life.

Fiksdal: That's what we wanted so much.

Smith: And that's what Evergreen was.

Fiksdal: It was at that time. And you were surrounded by students who wanted to learn. They're not there for another reason.

Smith: Yes. I was amazed at how smart they were. Oh, my gawd, they were smart.

Fiksdal: But clearly, you were, too.

Smith: It took me a long time to see that. I really didn't think so, and I'd never been told that. I was always told I was sweet. Sweet and pretty were my adjectives that I was hearing a lot. Never how smart I was. Never.

Fiksdal: So interesting.

Smith: And shy. I was shy, sweet, and cute.

Fiksdal: But you thrived.

Smith: I think I was depressed. I really do. I think I spent years being depressed. Low grade. Not anything serious. There was never a suicide. People would say, "Why don't you smile more?" And I thought, what have I got to smile for? What about? What?

Fiksdal: But back then, we didn't talk about depression.

Smith: No.

Fiksdal: I don't know if I could name that in '73, '74, '75, or before.

Smith: Especially before. Depression then was just feeling bad. "I feel depressed," and that just means that day, that minute or something.

Fiksdal: Interesting.

Smith: Girls would get depressed anyway and were such drama queens. But I wasn't happy. I wasn't happy growing up. I wasn't happy in school. I didn't see the point.

When I got out of Evergreen, I hadn't opened up at that point, and a friend of mine that I'd become very close to—I wanted to go to Oregon to become a naturopath because of Life and Health and Human Health and Behavior. I became a vegetarian. I began to see things through a different lens, and I wanted to be a naturopath. But I couldn't figure out how I would be able to do that with my daughter.

Then a friend of mine said, "Why don't you go to graduate school with me?" I thought, okay, where's that? She said, "I'm going to PLU and I'm in the counseling program." I said, "Oh, sure. Why not?"

I talked to the head of the program, and she looked at me and I had my transcript with me. She looked at it and she went, "Shary, I don't know what this says. I had a student from Evergreen before you. She was one of the best students I've ever had, so you're in." That's how that worked.

Fiksdal: Wow. She didn't even read the transcript?

Smith: She didn't read it.

Fiksdal: If she had read it, she would have wanted you also.

Smith: If she read it, she didn't tell me that. She'd just say, "This isn't a transcript." I go, "It's what we do." She said, "That's not a transcript to me."

Fiksdal: But she admitted you.

Smith: She admitted me because of this other Evergreen student. [laughing]

Fiksdal: That's what's really funny because you didn't even know what you were doing. You were just in a counseling program that your friend was in.

Smith: It's like, okay, I'll do that. It was so funny. [laughter] But there is something that was pushing me in the right direction.

Fiksdal: Exactly. Subconsciously somehow, there you were.

Smith: I got into that program, and I flourished. Then I became the teaching assistant. After that, I was a social worker in Olympia with the elderly. I did not like it. It was not for me. I would go to these people's homes.

Fiksdal: Oh, dear.

Smith: I would be the only person they would have seen in a whole week. They were sick. They needed food. They had food, but they couldn't cook. They got Meals on Wheels. It was so sad to me. I just couldn't do it.

I was working also at the Union Street Center. Have you heard about the Union Street Center?

Fiksdal: No.

Smith: A lot of Evergreen people were involved in that. Roger somebody was the head of it. Brilliant man. A little off. I know his wife.

I started teaching communication skills to students diverted from the juvenile court. I loved it. They were older. The kids were older, and they weren't elderly. It was a level of humanity that I thought I could relate to.

I loved those young people, but the problem was I was teaching them communication skills. They got very good at it. They were very quick. They would go home and talk to their parents and say, "I'd really like to talk to you about something that's bothering me." And they would get whacked. "You don't talk to me like that, you young punk." They were all diverted from the juvenile court. They'd been in trouble, but I could see why. I thought, this isn't working. I'm setting these kids up . . .

Fiksdal: . . . for another failure.

Smith: Yes. In the class, they were brilliant, but they'd go home, so I started teaching the parents. "Bring your parents in. Let's do this together." I started doing that and I loved it.

One day, I was walking down the street. Richard Rowan was there. He was also volunteering, and I met him there. One day I saw him on the street, and we started talking, and he said, "By the way, there's a position open at Evergreen." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes, it's in the Counseling Center. You should apply." I did, and I got hired. That's how it started.

Fiksdal: What year are we now? '76-ish?

Smith: It was about 1980.

Fiksdal: You worked under Richard? How long do you think that was?

Smith: I was there 20 years. It had to be half of that, eight to 10 years maybe. It was a long time. He just kept falling apart. He just kept getting worse.

Fiksdal: So, he left?

Smith: Yes, he was put on leave. That's when I stepped in as the director of the Counseling Center. I did that for a year. Then he came back, and he then worked for me. That lasted another year and then he left.

Fiksdal: That must have been terrible to have someone come back in that way.

Smith: I thought we could work it out. I thought we had been bonded enough that we could work it out. Because I said, “Richard, I didn’t do this. I didn’t want this. I thought you were coming back as the director and I was fine with that, and I thought we could work it out.” But we couldn’t. He wouldn’t.

Fiksdal: I can understand that.

Smith: I can, too.

Fiksdal: It would be very hard. Then you were head of counseling.

Smith: Yes.

Fiksdal: And you remained head of counseling.

Smith: Yes.

Fiksdal: You mentioned there was another problem.

Smith: There was another issue in the Health Center. The dean put me in charge of the Health Center with an employee working under me. It was the same kind of situation. It was untenable.

Fiksdal: She had been in charge and then he put you in charge of her.

Smith: Yes, she was the director, and she and I had been colleagues. We worked together as best we could because we both saw it as a holistic center. It was really a perfect marriage, in theory, because if they saw somebody had mental health problems, there we were. If I saw someone that had maybe underlying physical problems, there they were. We would share back and forth. It was a great idea. When it worked, it was wonderful, and when it didn’t work, it was awful.

Fiksdal: I can imagine.

Smith: When I became the head of both, the Health Clinic didn’t like me. It wasn’t me, it was the situation. There was a woman there that was the business operator in the Health Clinic. I relied heavily on her because I didn’t know how to run a health clinic. She also helped me run the business part of the Counseling Center, so she had both feet in both sides, and she was invaluable.

But there was an undertone all the time that I was there. Eventually, I just couldn’t do it. The dean was different then and she brought in, upon my approval or upon my request or my . . .

Fiksdal: . . . desperation.

Smith: . . . desperation, she brought in somebody else to—I relinquished my role as director, and I worked under her.

Fiksdal: Oh, interesting.

Smith: I was the type of person as a worker there that I had to do a lot of different things. I taught. I led groups. I taught interns. I ran the place. I had clients. I even had my dog there as a therapy dog. I loved it. I loved all these things. I didn’t sit in my office eight hours seeing people individually.

Fiksdal: But you had a staff. Right?

Smith: I had a staff and I had excellent students all the time, so I loved the diversity that I had. The new person took everything away from me, saying I was such a good counselor, that's what she wanted me to do.

What she was doing was getting rid of me because I couldn't do that. I couldn't sit there eight hours. I had been so used to being out in the—I was doing everything, and I was making sure everything got done. This makes me sound like a really creative, energetic person, but I was.

Fiksdal: But at the time, we had to be.

Smith: We had to do everything for everybody.

Fiksdal: We had to cover so many things that weren't being covered.

Smith: Yes. And I loved it. I loved it. I loved all of the different things. I would come just exhausted, but I could do it. But then she took it all away.

She said, "I'm going to take this away." I started the drug and alcohol program. "I'm hiring a drug and alcohol professional for this. And I'm going to take this group away. I'm going to take that group away. You don't have to do this. You don't have to do that." I thought, I'm done.

Fiksdal: She just wanted you to counsel students?

Smith: Yes, and I couldn't.

Fiksdal: After you had been the head. So weird.

Smith: She wanted me out.

Fiksdal: Complete control.

Smith: She wanted me out of there. So, I left in, I think it was, '99.

Fiksdal: That was 20 years in the Counseling Center?

Smith: I think it was about 20 years, 1980 to '99. Almost 20 years. Simultaneously, my father was dying. I moved him into my home. I have an apartment here. I moved him into my apartment with a caretaker. That lasted just so long. He had dementia Alzheimer's, and he was out of control. We had to put him in the hospital. Then we had to put him in a home.

I was absolutely devastated because my parents meant everything to me. He finally blessedly died. Then my mother had a stroke. They were the same age. My mother had a stroke. I brought her here. Set her up in the living room with a hoist because she couldn't move. Had caretakers.

I had a social worker who was working with me, and I finally said, "I can't do this. What am I going to do? I can't do this anymore." I just felt so guilty. He helped me through that. We put her into

a family home, and I knew she would die without me. I knew she would. We put her in that home, and she stopped eating.

Then my husband at the time, his father died, and one of our dogs died. That was within nine months. My daughter was on the East Coast having kids, so I said, "I need to go back there and get an apartment and help my daughter." She'd just had her third baby. "But I don't want to live with her with all the kids. I'll live in an apartment and help her every day."

We ended up moving there, my husband and I. I lived there 15 years. The youngest now is 18, but the oldest one 26. Wade, my husband, said, "Shary, I think we can go back home now." I had this house rented, and so we came back here.

He said, "I'm going to tie things up. I'll quit my job. I'll get a job in Olympia. We'll live in Olympia." Well, he never came. [laughing]

Fiksdal: He didn't come? You moved back and he never came?

Smith: Yes.

Fiksdal: Wow. So, you came back to Olympia. What I'm wondering is when you taught with Earle McNeil. Maybe that wasn't fulltime, and I thought it was?

Smith: I was working fulltime at the Counseling Center and teaching with Earle in his full-time program.

Fiksdal: Oh, wow.

Smith: I don't know how I did it. I really don't. It was a fulltime program.

Fiksdal: Because they're so demanding.

Smith: And also, he had a lot of trouble. The second year we taught he wasn't there.

Fiksdal: He was trying to recover from that tumor-- acoustic neuroma.

Smith: He was. It was a horrible time for him, so he said, "I can't come the second year."

Fiksdal: You were alone teaching?

Smith: I was alone, and Betty Kutter stepped in.

Fiksdal: Oh, thank heavens.

Smith: I know because I couldn't do the science.

Fiksdal: Well, no.

Smith: I just said, "Earle, we'll deal with this. We just will." He meant the world to me. [laughing] And I was still working fulltime at the Counseling Center. It was common for staff to teach as well.

Fiksdal: I can see that there would be a lot of jealousy. You were a faculty member and staff, and people who were just staff probably were jealous of that fact.

Smith: Yeah, I think there was a lot going on I didn't know.

Fiksdal: And you knew a lot of people. A lot of faculty, obviously. That's very interesting. I'm so sorry you had to do that on top of all that you were doing anyway.

Smith: I felt like at Evergreen, they would just drain you dry if you'd let them, and I would let them, because I loved it there. Every day, I would walk to the campus, and I'd say, "Thank you, God, for letting me be here." I felt so privileged. "Thank you. Another day, I get to be here," because of my devotion.

I adored Evergreen. It got the best of me because I gave everything I had. I'd come home at night and there would be nothing left of me, which I don't think that was good for my marriage either.

Fiksdal: But that happened to all of us. It was hard. We all came home exhausted.

I want to go back to the counseling now. You started a drug and alcohol program, and I know that was a major issue all through the time at Evergreen, and got worse, I believe, as time passed. I didn't become a dean till 1996, but someone from the Counseling Center came and talked to us. I really don't know if it was you or not because you do look really familiar to me.

Smith: Yeah, you look familiar to me, too.

Fiksdal: I think you had a chart and talked about—it was much bigger in those years, or we were being made aware of it in clear terms.

Smith: I don't think it was me.

Fiksdal: For us, it was a wakeup call. We had seen students drop out for various reasons, and sometimes you know and sometimes you don't.

I just wanted to ask you about the kinds of problems you encountered. Now, you can hardly pick up a newspaper without reading about high levels of anxiety in college students and high school students. Did you encounter high levels of anxiety and depression in students when you were there?

Smith: Yes. One of the biggest surprises to me in the Counseling Center when I started there was the level of dysfunction, pain, depression, mental illness. I couldn't believe it. I just could not believe so much childhood sexual abuse. Horrifying. So much battering. So much depression as a child that they brought with them. I was shocked.

Fiksdal: That they could still be a student.

Smith: Yes. The one thing I was so glad of is I could not work with underage children that were being abused. It's just not in me. But after they'd left home, I was a great person for them because I knew they weren't in it. They could heal at that point and move forward.

But what they brought with them was just unbelievable. I did not see that coming. I thought it would be roommate problems. I thought it would be "I don't understand my teacher." "I'm falling behind." It wasn't that.

Housing and I worked very closely together. My hands were always tied because of the confidentiality. There were so many things I wish I could have said. And I wish I could have contacted faculty about students. I couldn't. I couldn't contact parents either.

Fiksdal: Yeah, that's a real problem. Because they were 18.

Smith: Yeah. But, yes, there was anxiety. There was depression. There was suicide. I had to call in mental health professionals at times.

Fiksdal: This was attempted suicide. Right? Not actual?

Smith: Yeah. Nobody on my watch that I can remember ever killed themselves, but there was so much severe depression.

Fiksdal: That's just very sad.

Smith: And no one would know it. They'd go to school. They'd go to faculty programs and function, and I knew what they were going through. I loved the students. I just feel in love with every single one of them.

Fiksdal: Sometimes they would open up. That was really hard because I was not trained as you were. All I would do was just say, "I'm listening to you, and when I look at you in class, remember I'm with you." But that's all I could [do]. I couldn't figure out what to say.

Smith: That was the right thing to say. It really is.

Fiksdal: Good. But I think from the beginning, the psychologists we hired wanted faculty to be more trained, because they felt that there would be these issues, and some of them did counsel students on top of their work teaching. But the trickle-down idea never really worked too well. As a woman, a lot of women students opened up to me, but male students did, too. It was hard when they did.

You know about a major event that happened at Evergreen. You witnessed it, and I learned a lot about it. I wonder if you could talk about that now. It's really sad, but it's important to talk about it, I think.

Smith: I learned a lot from that incident. Ken Jacob was the head of Security, and he and I worked together all the time.

Fiksdal: He was at the college for a long time.

Smith: He was there for a long time. I hardly ever left the office, but one morning, I went with the school nurse next door—she and I were friends—to go to the CAB and have coffee in the morning before we got going. We walked down in the basement and there was big double door.

Rachel, the nurse, and I were walking past the double doors, and I just looked in to see who was there. There was Ken Jacob sitting over here with his colleagues that he was working with. At the door

itself was a young man with his back to the wall. His back was to the wall, and he was looking inside the room.

I notice things. I notice things other people don't see. I thought, what's he doing? I saw Ken sitting there so I thought, I'm going to get a cup of coffee, and if that guy is still there, I'm going over and I'm going to tell Ken to check him out.

That was a decision I will always regret. I walked around. Got some coffee. Came into the side door into the cafeteria while he was shooting her in the head.

Fiksdal: Who was he shooting?

Smith: His girlfriend.

Fiksdal: Point blank?

Smith: Yes, point blank. It was da da da da. Four shots.

Fiksdal: Four shots?

Smith: Yes. Everyone's frozen, of course. I look at Ken. Ken is sitting there, and the officers are sitting there, and we're all watching this. Then she bends over. He only got her. She was sitting at a table with four students. She bends over. He walks out the door with a gun hanging down, walked out the side door to the plaza, and sits on the brick wall. He sits there and stays there.

Fiksdal: Nobody's running after him?

Smith: Then they do. Then they run after him, but he just sits. He doesn't move. I snap out of it. I rush over there. I get the students out of there and I take them to the Counseling Center. There were probably—I don't know now—20. I take them to the Counseling Center and Richard is there.

I said, "Richard, we just had a murder, or a shooting. We have to do something with these students." So, we took care of them there. I stayed there.

Fiksdal: Thank gawd you were there. But what a horrific thing to witness.

Smith: It was. I don't know really what happened then. I don't know what happened to her. They captured him. They got him. He didn't put up a fuss.

Moving forward, I was interviewed because I was a witness. It seemed like it was maybe a week or so later, they said, "Shary, we need to send you to Seattle," to deprogram me.

Fiksdal: They finally thought about you.

Smith: Yeah. I hadn't thought about me. I thought I was fine. I said, "I don't really need it. I'm okay." They said, "No, you're not."

There was somebody else with me that went up to Seattle, and I think may have been some of the police officers. They sent us up to Seattle to . . . I don't remember where, but there was a place in

the police department somewhere that knew how to—I can't think of the word, when they help you readjust.

Fiksdal: Just talking through it?

Smith: Yeah, there's a word for it and I can't think of it. I realized I did have post-traumatic stress. I didn't know it. I thought I was fine. That really did help. I was resistant to it. I thought, no, I'm fine. But I wasn't.

Then they put him in jail for several years. I would get notifications that he's still there, and then I got a notification he'd been released. I was on some sort of watch list in case—but he didn't know me. He didn't know, but they were being super careful.

Fiksdal: But still, it was a reminder each time.

Smith: Yes. The thing that I've always regretted—and I don't know if I regret it or not—is, why didn't I go directly to Ken Jacob and say, "Ken, there's something funny out there"? But if I had done that, he may have killed Ken.

Fiksdal: Yes, exactly, or you.

Smith: Or me.

Fiksdal: You don't know.

Smith: I don't know. I had some guilt about that. I guess I had survivor's guilt. That's what they were treating me for. Why did I make it if she didn't?

Fiksdal: My gawd.

Smith: Her parents came. We had a funeral. She was a lovely person.

Fiksdal: I had a student die in a traffic accident, and it was very traumatic. But I didn't witness it. But still, it's really hard.

Smith: It was just so ironic that I was there.

Fiksdal: Yes.

Smith: Because I never did that.

Fiksdal: It's really something. All I kept thinking about was how much help you gave those students immediately. You knew what to do. You got them out of there, got them into the Counseling Center, got them talking. Thank heavens. I don't know how that would have happened otherwise. It probably wouldn't have happened.

Smith: I don't know what would have happened, and I don't remember once I got them there what happened. I know Richard was there and I thought, thank god Richard's here. He can take it from here. I don't know who those students were. I don't remember doing any follow-up. It's just a big blank.

Fiksdal: Yes, it was a blank because you were going through so much that you didn't realize you were on autopilot, I have no doubt.

Smith: Yeah, I think so.

Fiksdal: That student was Doranne Crable's student. We both share a friendship with her.

Smith: Yes.

Fiksdal: That was really upsetting for her. She could have benefited from some counseling, I think.

Smith: Yes.

Fiksdal: But I don't think she got counseling. She always thought of herself as able to handle things. I really regret that I can't interview her for our Oral History Project.

Smith: Oh, I know.

Fiksdal: If you think of anything you'd like to talk to me about her, that would be terrific.

Smith: Yes, I told you I was friends with her before she got that job, and her husband worked with my dad.

Fiksdal: Yes, that's right. I was friends with her because she moved to my neighborhood. [laughter] She was so articulate, and, of course, had her PhD, and didn't have a job. She was just there because of her husband. You could tell it was not going to work out for her too long.

Smith: She was a fish out of water here.

Fiksdal: Yeah. It was hard to be a wife with all that experience she had, all her training. You met at a dinner party or something?

Smith: I met her through my father because her husband was one of my father's pets. My father was the Vice President of the brewery, and her husband worked for my dad as one of his, I think, top salesmen. My dad was the sales manager.

Every once in a while, my dad would have people over for dinner, and he would invite me if they had a young person my age. In this case, it was Doranne. Because I was working at the college and he knew that she was wanting to be a teacher, so he put us together.

Fiksdal: Very nice. Her first program there was with me.

Smith: Was it?

Fiksdal: I insisted that they hire her. I think it was a halftime program we did in the evening for women at that time.

Smith: That's what she would have loved.

Fiksdal: We had to develop the idea, and it was her great love of Auden—

Smith: W. H. Auden?

Fiksdal: Yes, W. H. Auden.

Smith: That's so interesting. I'm reading a book about him right now, his biography.

Fiksdal: For heaven's sakes. What a coincidence. This line in one of his poems was the name of our program, Ages of Anxiety in Spring, 1980.

Then she moved away from literature, which was her field, because they always needed some strong faculty in the arts who could anchor those arts programs in literature to make them more interdisciplinary. She had a lot of background in various arts so that worked out.

But she developed her own skills as well, especially in drama, by going to just everything under the sun, all theater productions, especially up in Seattle, getting to know people and learning the vocabulary. She did that on her own.

[Transcription ended at 00:59:30]