

because of Peter Bohmer
Interviewed by Anthony Zaragoza
The Evergreen State College oral history project
Part Two
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FINAL

Zaragoza: We are here with Peter Bohmer on August 6, 2019 for part two of his oral history interview. Peter, would you pick up where you left off? You had just told us the story of being at the Capitol, and trying to get your colleagues there to have a more focused and effective presentation. You were standing on a table making this announcement, and you didn't get the kind of support that you wanted from Evergreen, though you maintained your position there.

Bohmer: Yes. There were some attempts because of this occupation of the Capitol to have me fired. There were some other Evergreen faculty who were involved and the Administration also tried to silence them. It wasn't just me alone, but very few faculty. I was trying to make the focus what we had asked the Legislature and the Governor to do: to take a stand against the imminent war, and to also support any GIs who refused to be deployed to Kuwait or Iraq. So that was the purpose.

It did create a lot of publicity, but the war started a day later, and the protests rapidly declined in size and energy. I have noticed as with some of the wars the United States has been waging recently, such as the second war against Iraq in 2003 and the war against Afghanistan that began in 1991 and still continues; there were large protests before these wars began. For example on February 15, 2003, there were millions of people around the world who protested. And there was a protest of more than a thousand in Olympia, a pretty significant number, although not as big as for the 1991, Gulf War. After the war started, many thought protest and resistance were futile thought and the hype for these wars was immense, and the protests waned. We couldn't sustain the energy and organizing that was going on just before those wars actually started.

Zaragoza: How we got to this topic was we were talking about your early years at Evergreen. What were some of your impressions of Evergreen itself at that time, and how do you understand those early years for you at the Evergreen State College?

Bohmer: One point of view that I have always resisted—since 1987, when I got there—is this mythical past, that Evergreen was this ideal college that was totally democratic, with, with a critical education pedagogy and with critical and engaged and independent students who all wanted to change the

world. To me, that has never been true. Evergreen opened in 1971. The founding faculty were almost all white and male. Even though Evergreen is still disproportionately white in terms of students and faculty, the proportion of students of color and working-class students of all ethnicities and more multi-racial are greater today than they were in the late 1980's and early 1990's and from what I have heard, much greater than when Evergreen opened. This is also true for faculty. That is my strong impression.

To me, there is no mythical past where Evergreen was this great and ideal place and that we need to return there. The top administrators at Evergreen in the past and present have for the most part been what I would call corporate liberals; that the President and the Provosts have often wanted to make some reforms, like more diversity; and also that Evergreen in terms of mission and practice is much better, more progressive than most universities. But in terms of a school committed to really fundamental change and critical education, I don't think it has ever been that.

There was one Provost, Patrick Hill, who I already mentioned, who wanted Evergreen to be a school committed to a critical pedagogy and to furthering economic and social justice and liberation. He had a different view of what the mission of Evergreen should be from other top administrators, but he is one of so many. So I have always been somewhat critical of Evergreen, maybe more critical now but also appreciating its strengths.

It reminds me of where I got my Ph.D., the economics department at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. We were commonly called a radical department. To me, the word radical is very positive. To me, it means going to the root of the problem, which to me is capitalism and change from the bottom up. When I studied and taught classes at U Mass, I always had these two ideas in mind. One that the economics department is a much better place in terms of learning and social relations, for example, secretaries were for the most part, treated with respect, which is an important issue to me—compared to MIT, where I also spent many years at. The Economics Department at U. Mass was much better than most economics departments, especially in what it taught, but it was also far short of what it claimed to be, a radical department.

I think the same with Evergreen; that a lot of phrases are used here about justice, about critical learning, about pedagogy, about learning to understand the economic, social and climate crisis we are living under to combat them, this is better and more relevant better than the education at Penn State or San Diego State, where I taught before, but also so far short of what it claims to be; what many faculty and administrators self-congratulate themselves about. I have always had this view: Evergreen

is both better than most colleges but so far short of what is necessary and the language it uses. It is important to simultaneously remember both of these truths.

With other colleges I taught at, when friends and acquaintances asked me, should they send their children there, I usually had mixed feelings, many or mainly negative. At Evergreen, I usually said yes it is a good school for many students. I would ask potential students and their parents, if the students were self-motivated and if they said yes, I would recommend Evergreen quite strongly. Among friends of mine who had grown up in inner city, Black or Latinx communities, I recommended Evergreen for their sons and daughters but would also mention the challenges of attending Evergreen because there were often few students from similar backgrounds. White students who had grown up in white suburban backgrounds were a large proportion of the student body, and were often somewhat unaware of the culture of students from different backgrounds.

Did I answer your question?

Zaragoza: Definitely. And in terms of the educational setup and methodology, what were some of your early memories around the actual teaching and learning at Evergreen?

Bohmer: This was one of my first memories of teaching at Evergreen, a very positive one. I had been teaching for three years at a branch campus of Penn State, a working-class campus and city that had been abandoned by U.S. Steel, McKeesport. I mainly taught principles of economics classes. I remembered teaching one class I was excited about, Comparative Race Relations, where I compared and contrasted the racial system and struggles for racial justice in South Africa to the United States. I put a lot of time into teaching the class and although I believe I organized a stimulating curriculum, I had trouble getting the students to talk. I tried to teach by making seminars a major part of the class and often prepared discussion questions. The main feedback I got from students was they preferred I lectured the entire period. This was at Penn State in 1987. I also had this experience to a lesser extent when I taught another class there that I designed, The Economics of Unemployment.

My first academic program I taught in at Evergreen, was for mainly, first year students, a core program, Technology and Human Reason. It had four faculty each quarter which used to be common and no longer is. It also was an all year program which also is less and less common. The other faculty were science or philosophy of science faculty. I taught most of the social science in this interdisciplinary program. I remember I got some criticism from quite a few students for talking too much in seminar. I thought that was fantastic as I came from a place where students wanted to just listen. A student said they kept track in fall quarter counted and I had taken up one-third of the time in seminar. I don't

think it was that much, but it probably was too much. That was so different from what I had been used to. It was positive that students wanted to speak up more and were willing to constructively criticize me.

I continue to believe lectures have value but I realize they are good for some students but not others. In my first few years at Evergreen, I definitely was lecture-oriented, I have evolved to a style where students feel comfortable making comments and asking questions throughout my presentation. From my first year at Evergreen until the present, interdisciplinary and coordinated team teaching has been very appealing, I value it.. Also very appealing to me was that many, close to a majority of the students were in college, because they really wanted to find out what was going on in society, and to make the world a better place, not just because their parents told them to, because their friends did, or only for career reasons so I was really motivated.

I got hired to teach in the MPA, the Masters of Public Administration program, which I mentioned before. But year by year, certainly by 1991, I decided I fit better into the undergraduate programs. I feel I have impacted many, many students in terms of their world view and what they have done with their lives, not only their jobs. Sharing my experiences has become an important part of my teaching. I didn't talk much about my life experience in the beginning. It is very different from most faculty, some of what I talked about in my first interview with you.. I held back because although I like people to respect me but I have never wanted people to put me on a pedestal or idealize me, because you will usually fall off the pedestal and I prefer more equal relationships.

I gradually began to talk more about my experiences as an organizer and activist and about my experience with repression. In particular my good friend and faculty member, Savvina Chowdhury, encouraged me to share more of my history with students. I have increasingly done that and I think it has helped my teaching, that I am about more than just a radical analysis.

Zaragoza: Talk to us more about some of the programs or teaching that you have done —you started in 1987, and you are still teaching to this day, so that's 30-some years. Give us some highlights of that 30 plus years of your programs, your teaching.

Bohmer: Okay. The class I taught the most, even though I am always modifying it, used to be called Political Economy and Social Change. That was its title when I first got to Evergreen and at first I kept the title. I have taught it with between two and five faculty and one from one to three quarters, although almost always for fall and winter and most commonly with three faculty. For the last 20 plus years, when I have taught in it, we have called it, Political Economy and Social Movements: Race, Class and

Gender (PESM). I have taught this program, 13 of the years I have been at Evergreen for a total of 25 quarters.

Zaragoza: Wow.

Bohmer: It has been a lot of work because we usually include principles of microeconomics and principles of macroeconomics as part of this program, and that has usually fallen on me. Savvina Chowdhury, whom I have mentioned, Carlos Marentes are the only people with economics background that I have taught it with, Savvina, twice, and Carlos, once. All of the other faculty I have taught with in this have had different backgrounds. This program has been very rewarding.

I have loved teaching it, in the past it was primarily a historical analysis of capitalism with a strong influence of Marx. I have become increasingly critical of many academic radicals and of the related curriculum that focus on how horrible and unreformable capitalism is, that if you can show this it will radicalize students. Developing a critical analysis, a systemic critique of capitalism is absolutely necessary and important. However, I increasingly believe, that by itself, it makes students feel even more powerless and cynical and depressed than they already do. So my focus increasingly—and I think I could have done even more—is stressing resistance and social movements, that there is a feasible alternative to capitalism. I have made more central to this program and my teaching in general, both the resistance—the social movements part—and exploring alternatives to capitalism.

The book I have assigned most often in this and related academic programs, which is my favorite book of all time, is *The People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. Howard and this book are major influences in my life. I also used it in the MPA program, although there was resistance by the faculty to assigning it. To me, what is so powerful about the book is that it shows the systemic oppression, the incredible inequalities of income, wealth and power, and the history of injustice in the United States and the negative role of the United States, internationally. But it always shows ordinary people, not always winning but always fighting back and resisting.

I knew Howard Zinn reasonably well. I once invited him out to Olympia., I believe inn 1993. Friends tease me because I had him speak 14 different times in three days. He said he wanted to do it, the more places the better. but later, people always teased me about overworking him. Howard stayed with me. I remember going out every day with him to the Spar restaurant in downtown Olympia for breakfast. He was always respectful of the workers there and talked with many. For example, he would go into the kitchen and talk to the kitchen staff about their lives. He was a great human being, a very wise one.

Many academics dismissed him because he wrote in an accessible style without academic jargon and without a lot of footnotes. On historical periods I am quite knowledgeable about such as Reconstruction and the 1930's, he consistently got it right and I think this is generally true. So I have used *A People's History*, often and it always influenced students or other I have used the book with or given to. I have sent many copies into the prisons also. People, when they read it, often feel very, very lied to by their past history teachers and the textbooks they read. They think they know about US history, and they realize from reading Zinn, there is so much important in U.S. history, they never learned such as major strikes and government repression.

Political Economy and Social Movements: Race, Class and Gender (PESM) has been a very, very important academic program in terms of helping students to understand the world better, and getting students while students or after in being active in social change movements or organizations or consciously working for social change in their jobs. In

In PRESM, we synthesize the global economy—which we usually do the second quarter more—with the U.S. economy which we do in the fall along with Marxism. One cannot analyze the United States in isolation from the rest of the world. We live in a global capitalist system, and that's a very, very central part of this program and other programs I have taught in.

I've taught the program with many other faculty and often with visitors. Besides Savvina Chowdhury, I have also been in teaching teams with Larry Mosqueda, Dan Leahy, Dan Leahy, all more than once. I also taught it twice with a visitor, Martha Schmidt, also other visiting faculty. We taught it together.

Zaragoza: That's right, my third year.

Bohmer: Right, 2006. I'm sure I'm leaving out people. Recently with Shangrila Joshi.

Zaragoza: We taught with Zoltan Grossman.

Bohmer: Yes, he was a relatively new faculty.

Zaragoza: You were telling me about the Political Economy and Social Movements program, the various times you taught it, what you learned in teaching it. I just had an interesting idea. Have you ever taught it where you started with the resistance? Then ask the question, what are all these folks up in arms about?

Bohmer: A little bit. I usually start the class with a book that's not theoretical. One book, which fits this model, fits it- It is important what you're saying—and I have used a few times is *Days of Destruction*,

Days of Revolt by Chris Hedges. I've also used other books like that in the class such as *Evicted* by Mathew Desmond. These and others I have begun the program with are strong in humanizing and personalizing oppression and poverty and inequality but not necessarily strong on resistance. I would say I haven't done enough in centering resistance. I have done it sometimes, beginning with resistance, or beginning with alternatives to capitalism, sometimes fictional. Often, the emphasis on social movements hasn't come until week eight of the second quarter, winter, week 18 of the program. When I taught PESM with Shangrila Joshi, we started the second quarter, winter 2019, analyzing socialism, the alternatives to capitalism. What we read here isn't necessarily an in-depth political economic analysis of participatory socialism, the socialism I most support. With Shangrila, we began winter quarter with *The Dispossessed*, by Ursula Le Guin, a brilliant book. I forget if we used it.

Zaragoza: We did.

Bohmer: I have used *The Dispossessed*, seven or eight times. In it, Le Guin examines a hypothetical society, Anarres, that is very equal, very democratic, but also very conformist. It raises an important question about how to consider both the individual and the collective, which to me is a really key contradiction in a socialist society. How does a society combine the needs of individuals who are not all the same, with needs of the collective or the collective good. In my teaching, I try to separate—even though it is not that easy—individuality from individualism. Individualism is a major social disease and growing globally. Individualism is furthered by neoliberalism which furthers it ideologically and by its institutions. Individualism is only thinking about and acting on one's own interest, not about others needs and interests, an indifference to how one's actions affect others. But we human beings are part of one race, the human race. We all bleed if somebody cuts us, and our blood is all human blood, but there are also individual differences among people. So, I differentiate individuality, which to me, capitalism limits, particularly if you are poor, a person of color, from individualism. A good society encourages individuality and discourages individualism. Resistance, social movements and alternatives to capitalism should be central themes from the beginning of the program and I have been increasingly committed to incorporating them into PESM and into my teaching and curriculum in a major way.

Zaragoza: Yeah, I was just curious. The beginning with resistance has occurred to me, and I've tried that before. There's maybe something to that. But in addition to PESM, what are some of the other programs you have taught?

Bohmer: I will limit myself to my undergraduate teaching and programs I have taught more than once. I have taught three times, the Current Economic Issues and Social Problems, it has usually been one quarter and a lower division program. I have taught it with Peter Dorman and Elizabeth Williamson and by myself. We usually examine several economic and social problems, e.g., mass incarceration, poverty, right to abortion, work and examine from different perspectives, causes, impact, and reform and more transformative solutions. It is less theoretical than PESHM which has usually been for sophomore students and above. A program that I have taught four times has been called slightly different names: Alternatives to Capitalist Globalization, Alternatives to Capitalism, or Alternatives to Global Capitalism. It has mainly been a two quarter program. I have usually taught it with Steve Niva but also with Lin Nelson. We need to 1) criticize the current society, which, to me, is global capitalism. Equally important is to have 2) some vision of an alternative, and the hardest part is 3) the strategy which connects the criticism of capitalism to where we want and need to go. In this Alternatives program we focus on strategy and especially, non-capitalist economic systems and models

The last time I taught it, in 2017-2018, it was a little bit different. We called the program, Alternatives and Resistance to Global Capitalism: Mexico, US and Beyond. I team taught this program with Maria Isabel Morales and Savvina Chowdhury. We spent two quarters in Olympia learning about Mexican history and social movements. We studied in some depth, theoretical alternatives to capitalism but also attempts to construct alternatives with a Latin American focus, e.g., Cuba. We spent over a week studying the Russia Revolution and subsequent developments there. Spanish instruction was also part of this program. We didn't have enough students to have all three faculty go to Mexico as you need 15 students per faculty. In the third quarter, spring quarter, 29 students, faculty member, Maria Isabel Morales and I spent 10 weeks in southern Mexico in Oaxaca and Chiapas,. They are the two poorest states in Mexico, and two of the most indigenous states in Mexico, that is not a coincidence. There are major struggles throughout Mexico and in Chiapas, against extractivism, the growth of mining there. Oaxaca and Chiapas are rich in resources but most people are poor there. We met with inspiring groups, mainly indigenous, resisting mining and displacement. This was an alternatives to capitalism class, it included a travel part as have other programs I have team taught or done individually.

Taking programs abroad has been an important part of what I have done and taught at Evergreen. I took a program of 23 students in spring 2004 to Cuba. We spent over seven weeks in Cuba after spending the first two and a half weeks in the United States preparing for our study abroad I am always looking for alternatives to capitalism, both in theory but even more, real examples. This has

been a focus of mine for 50 years. Cuba is a very important and dear place to me and I have been involved since the 1960's in Cuban solidarity work. I have been to Cuba five times. I actually lived in Cuba for four months with my four children in 2001, I taught U.S. Economic History at the University of Havana to Cuban faculty and worked at a Cuban research institute, the Center for the Study of the United States. Living Cuba made a lasting and for the most part, positive impression on our family.

Then, with Anne Fischel, I taught two one year programs about Venezuela in 2008-2009, and 2011-2012. We spent winter quarter in 2009 and 2012, there, the first time with 36 students and the second time with 30. Even though there are serious economic and political problems in Venezuela now—and the US plays a big role in that but the massive poverty, emigration, and hyperinflation, the crisis there cannot be reduced to the U.S. attempts to weaken and overthrow the government there. There are major internal errors that the Venezuelan government has made, e.g. with overvaluing the currency. Even given the current situation, Venezuela has been an important alternative with a lot to learn from and I have valued, witnessing it in person. In the period when Hugo Chavez was President, 1999-2013. It was a society that saw poor people as the subjects of history, not the objects. That is major.

Taking programs abroad which I have done to Cuba, Venezuela, twice, and Mexico has been labor intensive, even with Anne Fischel and Maria Isabel Morales, two very hard working and cooperative faculty. Evergreen should be more supportive of taking classes abroad, there is too much unnecessary paperwork. It has also been difficult because even though there are sometimes scholarships for low income students, they weren't for the classes to Cuba and Mexico, the students who travel abroad tend to be higher income students. We tried to make these programs more accessible. I can remember in the Cuba class, we did a lot of fundraising outside of the school such as dinners, dances and making and selling shirts, and thus had partial scholarships for the students. The school said it was couldn't do it which limited some of the fundraising. We did this but to a lesser extent in the Mexico program.

Zaragoza: Would you talk a little bit about the pedagogy of overseas travel programs? Because here, when we're on campus, there's the campus life and then there's the student's life off of campus, and those don't blend so much. But when you're away overseas in the class, those become nearly one and the same. How, as a faculty member, did you navigate some of the tricky issues that may come up with teaching abroad?

Bohmer: Just by way of introduction, in the three programs I mentioned—or four --because I did Venezuela twice—they were quite lengthy, from seven to ten weeks. Many of the students travelling abroad told me it was life transforming: going to a country in the global south, seeing US imperialism and intervention and its past and present but also seeing resistance in many forms and attempts to construct a more humane society based on the needs of the majority. In these programs for part or in some cases all of the time, we, the faculty, were with the students almost 24 hours a day. This was true in the Cuba program and when Maria Isabel and I were in Chiapas, we were in this beautiful place called Alternatos, “Alternatives” It is a place that a Chiapas group we were affiliated with, Otros Mundos, was building just outside of San Cristobal de las Casas. It was rural and a steep climb from the road and there was no wi-fi or even data. Lights went off by 9:00 P.M., it was still battery powered. And Maria Isabel and I were there with all the students, and being together all the time was difficult for all of us. And I sometimes feel like a counselor or therapist with students at Evergreen, but far more in travel abroad programs. In the Cuba class I felt like I was parent, teacher, and counselor. It was very challenging.

I like to connect with an institution in Latin America where students can improve their Spanish, not necessarily a university but more likely a progressive, social justice-oriented organization that makes some money by having people come from abroad. In all my trips with students, we, the faculty, made a priority to meet with local organized groups and institutions such as progressive unions, community health clinics, cooperatives, indigenous communities, student activists, women’s organizations, LGBT groups, Afro-Cuban, Afro-Venezuelan and Afro-Mexican organizations, and communities involved in land takeovers. For example, in Venezuela, when Hugo Chavez was President, we visited health clinics, called Barrio Adentro, that existed in most low income communities, supported by Cuba with much of the medical staff being Cuban.

Cuba played a very positive role in Venezuela. In return for receiving Cuban doctors, Venezuela sent oil to Cuba. This was under Chavez and Castro. So students saw this example of solidarity in practice. We often had students volunteering for a weeks in communities and grass roots organizations in Venezuela —I’m not sure how much they contributed. However, our idea was to give back a little bit, whether it was on farms, in cooperatives, or in community centers. So learning by doing, not just listening to presentations. We didn’t spent that much time hearing lectures, although some. Students involved in volunteer labor, most appreciated it although some complained in all four of these programs that they didn’t have enough free time. If we add the time in meeting groups in the places we visited and required study, it may have added up to 50 hours a week. It has been labor intensive for

me, both preparing and while in country but it is a great opportunity for students. I don't know if I have the energy to do it again, but I really hope Evergreen continues with programs that go abroad. That Cuba class was hard, because I had 23 or 24 students. I did it by myself. The other classes I did with Maria Isabel and Anne Fischel, so that did make it more manageable.

Zaragoza: Would you say that there are big lessons that, over these many trips teaching abroad that you learned that, over those trips, you now would or wouldn't encourage others to do to make the learning deeper, more prevalent, as well as the kind of living together and being together for that long of a period of time?

Bohmer: Those are hard questions. One problem, to a varying degree has been many students, no matter what they say before they travel, is that a major motivation is to have a good time by partying. This is a confusing issue. Let us consider, drinking alcohol. I don't believe students shouldn't drink at all, but excessive use of alcohol and getting drunk is a real problem. It has been a problem on some of the trips we've made, so maybe I should have been stricter and enforced more a no getting drunk policy. Enforcing that more. I tend to trust people. It's been hard, because some students told me I was wrong to trust them. I think learning on this travel to Latin America has been profound for the students involved but too much alcohol has been an issue.

Another issue is the one of respect. Even though we had faculty and staff who had taken classes abroad, Steve Niva, Therese Saliba, Jean Eberhardt and Michael Clifthorne talk to students travelling before they left Olympia about respecting people of other cultures and respecting each other, these are young people, for the most part. There were older students, too, but the issue of treating people with respect, not being "the ugly American." not being entitled was easier to talk about than to practice.

I have been positively impressed how respectful most students have been of those they met in our travels, so I am not saying most students were disrespectful to Cubans, Venezuelans and Mexicans, it is not a criticism of most students. But Evergreen and travel abroad programs should prioritize more, before and during their travel, what is and isn't appropriate behavior and why. A problem on our last trip—the one to Mexico—because of the numbers, you need 15 students per faculty to get your full salary and even sometimes to even go. So we accepted a few people who we should not have. We knew it and it definitely played out in Mexico. I don't know how to deal with that constraint except maybe lower the required number of students per faculty. It was different in both the Cuba class and the first Venezuela class. In that Cuba class, I had many qualified people who wanted to go, and I ended up

taking 23, far more than the 15 required and less than half of the people who wanted to go and less than who was qualified. There were very few problems.

Zaragoza: Because you could be more selective?

Bohmer: More selective, students who were mature and serious, I interviewed almost 80 students who applied, about why they wanted to go to Cuba for my 2004 program. Students saying they primarily wanted to travel as part of the college experience were a clearly flashing red light. So was those that said the specific country didn't matter, they just wanted to travel to Latin America.

In the first Venezuela program, we also had students making written applications. We turned down many but still ended up with 36. But in the second Venezuela class, and in the Mexico class, the numbers applying were down. I'm not sure why, maybe the more difficult economic situation many students and their family faced. Also by 2011-2012, Venezuela was less exciting as a revolutionary alternative than it had been a few years earlier. Also because Oaxaca was on a U.S. State Department list saying it was dangerous, students were not eligible for Gilman scholarships which many low income students had received in our travels to Venezuela. This reduced the numbers who could afford to go. Also many students prior to our departure in March, 2018 told me they were very interested in taking the program and travelling to Mexico but in the end decided not to. In the end we just got 29. We needed 30 but David McAvity, the budget dean, only reduced our expense allowances by a small amount. There were probably three students we shouldn't have taken. Evergreen should be more flexible with numbers, and we the faculty should be more careful of whom we take. Still travel abroad has been a very profound experience.

Zaragoza: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Bohmer: I also did a lot of work, and Anne Fischel did even more planning beforehand in the Venezuela programs, going to many locations in Venezuela and making many contacts to set up the program without getting financial support from the school. We, primarily Anne, also set up diverse opportunities for students to do volunteer work in Venezuela. We also paid residents of Venezuela whom we had met in our planning trips to Venezuela, before our classes to organize many of the logistics--sleep, meals, travel and also our meetings with many groups in the cities and communities we visited.

Zaragoza: Like prior scouting and recon.

Bohmer: Yes, I just mentioned the two Venezuela programs. In the Mexico program, we visited two Zapatista communities in June, 2018 and spent about a week with them. You can't just show up there. I met with people connected to the Zapatistas to work that out the arrangements, and also with many of

the organizations we collaborated with closely in Oaxaca and Chiapas, the summer before our program travel. I didn't do as much in country planning with the 2004 Cuba program, but I had made a lot of connections with Cuba over the years. I had lived there in 2001. So Cuba was easy, the main solidarity organization in Cuba organized much of the logistics. I want to conclude with how much I respect and like the great majority of students I have traveled with, what thoughtful and socially conscious and caring human beings they are; many I am still in contact with and consider friends and comrades.

Zaragoza: What about other ways in which you developed as a teacher? You mentioned some of these, but I'm just curious if you have other reflections on your teaching career? How did you develop over time?

Bohmer: One reason I have been effective as a teacher is that I am very enthusiastic and excited about the subject matter, I am teaching, it is also my personality. Also students see that I am an activist, not just a teacher in the classroom but actively challenging homelessness, for immigration and racial justice, against police brutality, antiwar and against U.S. overt and covert intervention in other countries, especially in the global south. Students respect by my combining theory and practice and this has contributed to many students also actively advancing economic and social justice as students but also after they leave Evergreen. I know this because many students stay in touch me after they graduate. Encouraging activism by teaching about it but also by doing it is central to who I am.

I have also gotten better in including students in discussions, in increasing participation during my presentations. The idea of workshops—you are very good at doing them—I have learned to do them. I should do them more. And with my lectures—I don't know if I should call them lectures, because there is usually a lot of active participation by the students and often, by teaching partners. I usually have very long handouts prepared which I usually distribute to the students just before I begin. There are a lot of questions and comments from students during my presentations which I welcome. I hardly ever finish my talks, i.e., go through all my notes or what I had hoped to cover. In addition to the many student questions and comments, I usually over prepare and try to cover too much ground. But because students have my handouts, I am less uptight about finishing and rush less at the end than I used to because I know the students have my handouts, which often includes the conclusion.

To get more students to be more attentive, I sometimes start my talk with an icebreaker. One icebreaker, I learned from Steve Nova—but I've adapted it—is the following. He would begin the Alternatives to Capitalism program with the following question, "Is it enough to be critical of US capitalism, or do you need to have an alternative in order to be critical? Examples like that. One I have

used a few times before my presentation on racial inequality is “Do we live in a post-racial society”? I used it when Obama was President. Since the increased knowledge of police murders of Black Men, and the Trump campaign and Administration, It’s obvious to almost all students that we don’t live in a post-racial society so I no longer use that question as an icebreaker.

I usually have a question I will ask at the very, very beginning of the class, which I didn’t usually do in my first 15 years at Evergreen. . I have learned to talk a little bit slower, partly speaking fast was the result of growing up in New York City although I speak faster than most New Yorkers. Many students have told me they thought they liked and learned from what I just said, but they weren’t sure because I speak so fast and they have pay too much attention just to keep up. It has been hard to slow down. Also, I haven’t been good at using visuals in class. Because of a society that is very oriented to videos, visuals are very important and students want them, even more than in the past. I have very seldom used PowerPoint. I used part of a PowerPoint from you on mass incarceration. I gave you credit, it was excellent. Last year, 2018-2019, I used the book, *Economics for Everyone*, by Jim Stanford, a very accessible economics text book. I have sent copies of this book to prisoners interested in economics. When using this book, I have used or adapted some of the PowerPoint slides that author, James Stanford, includes on the website for the book.

My written valuations from students have consistently been very positive. However, one common critique by students is that I should use more visuals and more PowerPoint slides.

Zaragoza: How about your own research? Do you want to talk some about your research over your career here at Evergreen?

Bohmer: I feel bad I haven’t done more.

Zaragoza: But is that an individual shortcoming, or is that a structural obstacle?

Bohmer: Probably both. Teaching at Evergreen and planning future programs take a lot of time even in the summer, the planning. Because I have been active organizing, and put so much time into teaching, this has left little time for research. I have also been a single parent since March 2000 when my ex-wife, Martha, died of cancer. My two younger children were 11 and 16 at the time. Although I have taught Political Economy and Social Movements: Race, Class and Gender program, I believe 13 times, it could be 12 or 14, I am always using new books, and I always try to do at least one or two totally new lectures per quarter, and I am always updating and revising lectures that I have given before. For example in my presentation on the political economy of racism, I have four pages of data on past and present racial

inequality which I include in the accompanying handout to my presentation. I spend hours each time getting the most recent data and incorporating it into the handout.

Teaching is very, very labor intensive for me, probably because I am a social person and student oriented teacher. I spend a lot of time with students and non-students. It is a personal choice, but it's also a lot of hours work.

I have written many, many articles for several left Internet websites such as ZNet and CounterPunch, probably 50 or more. I also frequently write for the alternative and left Olympia, monthly newspaper. *Works in Progress*. I have written at least 30 articles for it, many are write ups of talks I have given outside of teaching. I do research for these articles and talks but not traditional academic research.

In my 32 years at Evergreen I have given many, many public talks, mainly from Portland to Seattle, although many overseas also. I have done more in Portland than in Seattle—on the economy, on repression in the United States, past and present, on racism, on affirmative action, on immigration, on Cuba, on Nicaragua, on the Greek economy, on Venezuela, on Mexico, on US foreign policy, on the Vietnam War, economic inequality, on socialism, on healthcare, on capitalism, on neoliberalism austerity and alternatives to it, on organizing, on strategy for radical change, on my activism—many other topics. Probably the largest number have been in Olympia, more than ½ off campus. Some have been at rallies and demonstrations, others at forums or conferences, a few as lectures in other universities, e.g., Reed, MIT. Most have been in the United States although I have given talks at conferences or gatherings in Greece, Cuba, South Korea and Mexico. Some have been in Spanish.

I have also done many workshops and talks at four Washington State prisons, about two a year beginning in 2014. The focus of these workshops are political economy. Often I have organized a team of up to four teachers to do these workshops, many have been two full days, others have been one day, AM and PM. The subject matter and material is not all that different from what I teach at Evergreen. My most common presentations have been the political economy of racism, or ABC's of Capitalism and Socialism. Savvina Chowdhury and Carlos Marentes have frequently been part of our team and also have given presentations. Usually presentations are followed by small group discussion; commonly, 60 students (inmates) among four faculty. Almost all of these workshops and talks have been organized by an excellent group which is active in most Washington State prisons, the Black Prisoners Caucus, although one, two day workshop and another one day workshop at Coyote Ridge State prison were organized by the Hispanic cultural group. I have also been invited to make short presentation for

Juneteenth at the prisons in Shelton and Clallam Bay. I consider it a great honor to be invited. Most of the workshops have been from 50 to 60 people although a few presentations have been to much larger numbers, up to 200. These students are very engaged, both during the presentations and seminar discussions. I remember one workshop where inmates sent me 17 questions to answer and I got through only six of them in three and a half hours. We always make certificates which we give to students who attend. Most attendees are Black inmates except for the largely Mexican workshop at Coyote Ridge prison. Only once or twice have more than a handful of white prisoners attended these workshops. I value teaching and learning from African-American inmates and want to continue this but I hope to also more workshops that include more other racial and ethnic groups. Prisons are segregated and the main white prisoners group has a white supremacist ideology although they claim to be white nationalist, not supremacist. I advocate for a principled unity across racial and ethnic lines, but a unity based on making central anti-racism and anti-white supremacy. I also am very active writing letters to prisoners and sending them books and letters.

My academic writing has been very limited. I did write an article with Savvina Chowdhury and Robin Hahnel for the Review of Radical Political Economics (RRPE) which is about to come out on the organization of reproductive and household labor in a participatory socialist society.

I am planning to write with Savvina— we are very much at the beginning— a political economy textbook. Our plan is to analyze and criticize U.S. capitalism as fundamentally oppressive, to examine alternative to capitalism and to have one part on social movements and strategy. We will try to incorporate many of our presentations as the basis for chapters. In many ways, it will be writing up what we have teaching in. We are very committed to doing this but progress has been slow.

Now that I'm moving towards retiring—I only have two more quarters that I've contracted to teach—hopefully I will have more time for this writing. I will continue giving talks writing popular articles and working with young activists, probably less on the actual organizing and more in an advisory role. I will continue to be active in Economics for Evergreen, a group I helped found whose origins were in the educational workshops we organized during Occupy Olympia in 2011. We do monthly presentations that on the average, 60 people attend. I have been and will continue to be community-involved.

Zaragoza: How about governance at Evergreen? What kind of roles did you play, and what has been some of the major issues that you were most concerned about at Evergreen?

Bohmer: I'm going to use governance broadly.

Zaragoza: Please do.

Bohmer: I have brought many speakers to Evergreen. I mentioned Howard Zinn. Another major speaker I brought was Noam Chomsky, although unlike Howard Zinn, he only spoke once on campus, to 1800 people at the CRC, he also spoke to more than 800 at the Capital Theater. Other well-known speakers have included Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, a great Kenyan writer and Dennis Brutus, a poet and leader in the anti-apartheid struggle and the post-apartheid struggle for economic justice in South Africa. He also visited and spoke at the Tacoma campus. Usually what I’ve done is I have the people speak at Evergreen and in the community. That’s basically my model. For Chomsky, we charged for the downtown event but usually the off campus events are free or for a voluntary donation. I usually have gotten speakers for modest honorariums, usually getting money from a few different academic programs and some money from the academic deans and students groups.

So I consider that governance. So to me, that’s governance in terms of bringing an awareness to the campus. I was definitely involved—probably not to the school’s satisfaction, but in helping, supporting and initiating—having Leonard Peltier as a graduation speaker in 1994.

This is connected to another program that I taught in. It was called “ 500 Years of Oppression, 500 Years of Resistance” We taught it as whole year program during the time of the Quincentennial, 1992. There was a growing movement around the world starting in Ecuador, but international about indigenous people’s resistance and right to self-determination with a strong condemnation of colonialism and Columbus. I taught this program with Larry Mosqueda, Gail Tremblay, and Sunera Thobani, who was a visitor. Out of that class, the idea came—and I was certainly involved in that—having Leonard Peltier, an inspiring and wise human being who had lived in Seattle and been very involved in the American Indian Movement (AIM) as the Evergreen graduation speaker. Leonard Peltier was unjustly convicted of murdering two FBI agents at the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1975. What was and is 100 percent clear was that the evidence was totally cooked against him. So far all his appeals for overturning the conviction, for a new trial, for reducing his sentence, for clemency have been denied He is very sick now. I have actively supported Leonard’s freedom since he was arrested in 1976 and have spoken at many rallies on his behalf. I am still working on supporting his being released, but I don’t know how much longer he is going to live. Students selected Leonard Peltier as the graduation speaker for the 1993 graduation. He wrote a powerful speech, and a graduating student from Nigeria read it at graduation.

To explain the context for another controversial and inspiring and revolutionary graduation speaker let me begin with an important event integrally connected to Mumia Abu-Jamal, while on death row being a speaker at the June, 2000 graduation at our college. In late November and early December, 1999, there were major protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial meetings in Seattle. I was teaching PESM that year with Dan Leahy and a visitor, Cynthia Adcock. Our entire class of 75 student attended various events directly connected to the WTO Ministerial, including teach-ins and protests against the WTO that made worldwide news for a variety of reasons including the many issues the protesters connected, the creativity of the protests and the police violence. Many also attended pro WTO events. To raise awareness about corporate globalization and the negative role of the WTO, we organized teach-ins at Evergreen to prepare people, the Evergreen community but also beyond about the destructive impact of the WTO on workers, the environment and democracy. Dan Leahy took the lead in organizing this weekend conference at Evergreen at least a month before the WTO. Hundreds of students from Evergreen attended the week of activities in Seattle, sometimes called, "The Battle of Seattle, which included jail support for those arrested. Many of the key organizers were Evergreen students. For many students in our program it was a transformative experience. I am very proud of Evergreen's participation during that week, not only students but also many faculty and staff.

Out of that PESM program that I was teaching in, a few students decided to promote Mumia Abu-Jamal as the graduation speaker for 2000. I was involved in that decision and the organizing to make it a reality, but it was students from that program who, took the lead. They saw it as a logical continuation of the protests in Seattle. Originally, Mumia Abu-Jamal was voted to be the main graduation speaker at Evergreen. There was a lot of pressure from Governor Locke and many others., especially police organizations, to overrule the decision. Mumia Abu-Jamal, a brilliant and revolutionary radio journalist had been unjustly convicted of murdering police officer, Daniel Faulkner in Philadelphia in 1981 and sentenced to death. Jane Jervis, the Evergreen President, compromised but did not cave in to right wing pressure by having faculty member, Stephanie Coontz, be the official main graduation speaker. But Mumia Abu-Jamal remained as a graduation speaker and spoke from death row on the phone to a major student activist, Stephanie Guilloud, who had been active in organizing against the WTO. We played the recording at the graduation. Mumia talked about the best thing an Evergreen graduate could do was to be a revolutionary for transformation of the society. He said it didn't matter whether you were black, Latino, Native or Asian-American, it is what you did with your life. It was a powerful speech. Mumia Abu-Jamal is no longer death row and is challenging his current sentence of

life without parole. There were protests against Evergreen for Mumia speaking. I was very proud of Evergreen that day. I consider this part of my governance also.

I haven't very effective on some of these campus-wide committees that I have been on such as long run hiring. I'm not sure why, maybe because although I am close to some faculty, I am very different in my politics and commitment to radical change from most faculty. I am friendly to faculty and staff but not that close to most. Where I have been very active and more effective is on hiring committees for specific positions. I have been on many.

Zaragoza: And even pushed to create positions.

Bohmer: Yeah, for example, the Political Economy of Racism.

Zaragoza: The position that I am in.

Bohmer: Right. I was also the chair of that committee and also for the Feminist Economics position. I both wrote up the description of these two position and the rationale for them and then pushed for a hire many years, often feeling the support was pretty limited. For example, your position. There was active opposition—I don't know if I ever told you by some faculty—not to you but to the position. I also was chair of the hiring committee for the international political economy position that Peter Dorman was hired for, and the third world feminist position that Therese Saliba got hired for. Both have been excellent faculty members. So have Savvina and you who were hired for the political economy of racism and feminist economics position.

I was unsuccessful in my attempt to get a hire in African studies. I wrote up a proposed description and rationale for it. To me, it is unconscionable that a school as big as Evergreen not having any faculty in African studies. That proposal never got that much traction. I was hoping to get a position around Latino/Latina political economy and helped write up the description for it. You worked on it a lot. We got it, although it became more of a Latinx studies faculty position.

Zaragoza: Yeah.

Bohmer: That has been important.

Zaragoza: I mean that position turned out to be spectacular, in my opinion.

Bohmer: I think so, too. Maria Isabel Morales who got hired is a great addition to the faculty. She is a very smart and excellent, knowledgeable and dedicated faculty member, who is an excellent teacher and oriented toward serving underrepresented populations. She is an outstanding hire but she does

not have a political economy focus, even though we did teach a Political Economy oriented program together for the whole 2017-2018 academic year.

I have been on a lot of hiring committees, and I supported and advocated —this was way back when I first came here—for the hires of Larry Mosqueda and Angela Gilliam. I was on the overall hiring committee. Maybe because I am persistent, I have been effective and played a major role in getting these hires, most of whom have been on the left and people of color. That's one role I do feel very good about.

Zaragoza: Personally, I'm quite thankful for that, in many ways.

Bohmer: Good. [laughing] I'm really happy you're here. So that's taken a fair amount of energy. For many of these hires and these positions, I haven't had that much support, but some really good people have been hired.

Zaragoza: Any other reflections that you have about your career at Evergreen that you think is important for us to talk about, for folks to know about?

Bohmer: As I move toward the end of my teaching at Evergreen, I do feel bad about the following. It is the weakness of political economy at Evergreen—and I look at the field of political economy very broadly. I don't just consider it, radical economics. The analysis of "race", class, gender—how they're related to capitalism—is central to what I call political economy. As I said earlier, it includes as central studying resistance and social movements, and alternatives to capitalism. In the period we are living in, a period of crisis—economic inequality, growing authoritarianism and xenophobia, and the climate and environmental crisis which I have increasingly incorporated into my teaching and subject matter. I am nowhere near an expert on climate change and climate justice but I increasingly make it a major part of the programs I teach in. Political economy analyzes these key issues and economic and social problems in general in relation to capitalism.

Political Economy is such an important field of study, and it's weaker now than when I got here in 1987. So I do take it a little bit personally that we have been not that effective in maintaining and expanding its teaching at Evergreen. Right now we are promised to get a hire in Political Economy this coming year, 2019-2020 but I am quite certain Evergreen will not go ahead with this hire and make others where they feel the immediate need is higher. This has been an unkept promise for a few years. Because of the major drop in enrollment, there will be very few hires.

I am very worried about the future of Evergreen— the field of political economy, specifically, and Evergreen, more generally, the major decline the last few years in the number of students. It is not

just the fault of the Evergreen administration, it is a hard period for liberal arts colleges, especially non-traditional ones. Potential students and their families are worried about future job possibilities. So a less traditional university, even a public one, although more affordable than a private college are likely to have serious budget problems as a result of declining enrollments. For public universities, the budget problem is compounded by reduced government support for higher education. I feel bad that I haven't been able to do more in terms of having Evergreen and political economy being in better shape.

So my legacy is not institutional but rather how I have been a positive influence of many students in their lives after Evergreen. A friend of mine, Jules Lobel, who is the head of the Center for Constitutional Rights—a major and exemplary legal justice group out of New York said I should be proud of what I have done, how he often meets ex-students of mine who are doing important activism who tell him I am a major reason for their commitment to significant reform and radical change. This means a lot to me. Jules has visited me in Olympia and spoken at Evergreen a few times.

I hope that faculty are willing to like speak the truth about the current reality in a period where we are in a serious crisis, e.g. a growing racist authoritarianism around the world. An example of that is the very recent, August 3rd, 2019 mass murder at a Walmart in El Paso by white supremacist, anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican, Patrick Crusius. He killed 22 people mainly of Mexican background, which was his objective. Crusius is a particularly violent example of this growing and violent anti-immigrant authoritarianism. That stands out in his statement; he often cites Trump although he is even more extreme.

Zaragoza: And he drove down from Dallas.

Bohmer: That's important, because El Paso is basically a Latino city and shows his commitment to kill people of Mexican descent..

Zaragoza: That's right.

Bohmer: We are living in a time that reminds me of a quote by one of my heroes, Rosa Luxemburg, the possibilities for the future are either "socialism or barbarism". I hope the faculty here don't take the easy way out; that they speak the truth even if it is risky and many do not want to hear about what's going on and possible solutions and their roles including speaking truth, especially to those without power. I say truth to those without power rather than truth to power because of a criticism I once got from Noam Chomsky which I won't forget. I invited Noam Chomsky, who was a teacher of mine at MIT in 1968 in a class called, Intellectuals and Social Change, to speak at Evergreen, I believe in 1995. Noam has been a major influence in my life and we have stayed in contact for over 50 years. I took the

lead and we organized to have Noam speak at the Capitol Theater downtown and then the next day at the Evergreen State College gym, the CRC, this was I believe 1995.

I worked with a lot of other people to organize these two events. We had 1,800 people at the CRC. I introduced Noam and I didn't really have time to prepare. I should have, but I was running around so much organizing that I did the introduction without much thought. I said, "This is Noam Chomsky, a person who speaks truth to power." And he interrupted me in front of 1,800 people and criticized me. Noam said, "I don't believe in speaking truth to power. I believe in speaking truth to people who don't have power."

Zaragoza: Right, to each other.

Bohmer: Yes, to each other. Because to people who have substantial power in society, to them the truth and a good argument means little. Their actions are largely determined by their structural position. If you are the head of a corporation your role is to maximize profits, even though it may destroy the environment, maximize social costs, avoid taxes, lay people off, move firms abroad, etc.

So the faculty here—in this period of crisis, our lives are short—we should do what is significant and important, not mainly what furthers self-advancement and is non-controversial. I have tried to do that throughout my life, although imperfectly, I have certainly made mistakes. I am impressed by so many of the students here whom I have known who have figure out the causes and impact of our capitalist society, maybe not immediately but over time and are committed to fundamentally changing it.

I'll share one more story. I can't remember what year it was, somewhere around 2011, I received an e-mail from a student who said he had hated me while I was his teacher in his Political Economy class. I think it was a little before ours, but it was around that time. He said he even wrote a complaint about me to the deans on how biased I was because I was always criticizing banks and capitalism, and he thought I was totally one-sided.

In my teaching inside and outside of the Evergreen classroom, I always make explicit my perspective and analysis but I also try to create an environment where students feel comfortable to disagree with me. I often say, "I think this" or "this is my viewpoint" to make clear it is not the absolute truth. That student wrote me in his apology to me that the reason he was so upset with me was that he wanted to be a banker during his time in my program. He got a job after graduating with a bank, around 2005, and then during the financial crisis, he said he realized banks were actually much worse than what I had taught about them, that their only concern is the bottom line, no matter how unethical

the resulting behavior or how many people lost their homes. —I think it was Bank of America. He wrote that he wasn't ready to hear what I presented but after his experience he wanted to totally apologize and my critical analysis of financial capitalism was something he couldn't forget while working for a bank. We need to conceptualize teaching as often planting seeds. It's not a popularity contest. It's important to say what you believe although how we say it is also important. You don't want students or those listening to feel so attacked they tune out. On the other hand, you can't be so indirect that the message does not get through. I have tried to speak truth to those who don't have power and I really hope other faculty do so also.

I would like to come back to a point I made earlier. I mentioned the economics department at the University of Massachusetts being a radical department. To me an indicator of a radical department in practice, not just theory, is how the faculty and students of treat the secretaries and workers. If male faculty teach and write supportively of feminism but treat women secretaries as less than equal, I am critical of this contradiction. I have always tried with the staff people, secretaries, maintenance and grounds workers to be respectful and supportive. I have been friends with many of the staff here.

Zaragoza: I think I have more friends that are staff members.

Bohmer: Good! Often we may have huge political differences, but there has been mutual respect and a lot of conversation between the staff and me. So with regards to students and faculty, I always check out how they relate and treat the working-class staff on campus.

Zaragoza: Yeah. I appreciate that very much.

Bohmer: I've seen you the same way.

Zaragoza: Yeah. Like I said, I have more friends that are staff than faculty. It's been that way from the beginning, because that's who I could really relate to much more.

Final words from you? Where would you like to see Evergreen in 10 years?

Bohmer: I'm very, very worried about the future of Evergreen. One person, who we both know, thinks there's less than a 50-50 chance that Evergreen will survive for five years. Evergreen is worth saving, with all its contradictions. I feel the current administration, people on the third floor, even many of the deans, they use word like social justice, economic justice, Evergreen is different, this new pedagogy, but it's just words to them. We mean totally different things by these words and for many it is empty. We need an administration, in this very difficult period, —like Patrick Hill, who I mentioned was the Provost

when I got hired who said that the Evergreen niche should be a university where all programs consciously plan in their curriculum to further justice. The economic and social and environmental situation is worse now 30 years later than it was when he promoted that at a faculty meeting.

So my hope is the students—I've always been a very student-oriented faculty. I probably should have stressed more that I've always been a very student-centered faculty. You were saying Anthony, that you are closer to the staff than faculty. I am probably closer to the students than I am to faculty. Ex-students, too. I suggest with students playing a central role, in this very difficult period, the importance of working in coalition with progressive groups around the state—with alumni, with groups on other campuses and with community groups and labor unions, towards supporting an Evergreen that can sustain itself. This is urgent.

I was one of the two faculty most involved in getting the faculty union at Evergreen started, what became the United Faculty of Evergreen (UFE), with Sarah Ryan. I signed up more faculty than anyone else for recognition of the union but have been somewhat marginalized by the WEA paid staff, who have a lot of power and whom I have fundamental disagreements with. The faculty union, the UFE, has been very effective for furthering the interests of the adjunct faculty, and incorporating them as members and officers and that's very positive and commendable. They, especially Jon Davies, have also helped individual faculty in grievance hearings and against unjust discipline or dismissal which is important. I support the union and don't want it to be decertified. But I am a very firm believer in what is called social movement unionism—where unions are really social movements that deal with many issues, not just directly workplace issues, that supports and does direct action and I feel our union local follows the more traditional business union model.

Although of course I am a union member, I have withdrawn from active participation in the union. We desperately need a social movement union that prioritizes and is really involved with others to create the kind of Evergreen that we need and hope for, so that Evergreen can thrive, and a union that with many other organizations including a student movement at Evergreen and beyond, and with the staff builds enough power and an effective campaign so that the Legislature will continue to fund Evergreen sufficiently to deliver a quality and accessible education. That's always been the excuse, if we are too radical, the legislature will cut us off. I would like to see our union as part of the solution, and I don't see it that way right now.

Zaragoza: Okay, thank you, Peter. I'm much appreciative.