

Earle McNeil
Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal
The Evergreen State College oral history project
April 22, 2022
FINAL

Fiksdal: This is Susan Fiksdal. I'm here with Earle McNeil on Friday, April 22, 2022. We're here to get an oral history from Earle, who was here in the early years of Evergreen. The very first year, as a matter of fact. Earle, I'd like to start with your childhood, and understand a little bit about where you come from, who your parents were, and where you went to college.

McNeil: I was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan. My parents were in graduate school at the University of Michigan at the time. When World War II started, my dad was in the Navy, and so we moved to Virginia and lived on the naval base for a couple years, and then back and Dad finished his PhD.

When I was four years old, they moved to Pullman to WSU with my dad being a professor of zoology. I lived in Pullman essentially my whole life until I moved over here to the West Coast; from the time I was four years old until I was 24.

Fiksdal: Your mother was also a teacher?

McNeil: My mom was a research person in home ec. She was a research biologist. Of course, in the early years, she spent most of her time raising us three kids, but she did go back and do a lot of research after we got a little more independent.

Fiksdal: Were you the oldest?

McNeil: Yeah. I've got a brother and sister, but I'm the oldest of the three. It took her a few years before she went back.

Fiksdal: I'm guessing that because you grew up in a family where your parents had gone to graduate school that that was a foregone conclusion for you [to go to graduate school also—sf].

McNeil: Yeah, not only that, but we were in a small town with a big college.

Fiksdal: That's right.

McNeil: Two-thirds of the population of Pullman were college people, either professors or support staff, so my entire environment growing up mostly was faculty and some staff members that were in and out of our house the whole time, so being in a faculty environment to me was nothing unusual. In fact, being a faculty member to me was nothing more than just being another person.

Fiksdal: That's very interesting.

McNeil: Which was always an issue for me when I came to Evergreen because I kept treating the administration just as people.

Fiksdal: No, I think that was probably a good thing, Earle. [laughter] Tell me a little bit about how you happened to choose your field, psychology?

McNeil: Starting back a little bit, I was a real science nerd through high school—though my dad was a zoologist—I'm not quite sure why, but things like astronomy and physics and chemistry were my real joy. So, I ended up with a physical science degree as an undergraduate.

Fiksdal: Was that at WSU?

McNeil: At WSU. I started out as one of the kids that the Home Ec Department kind of played with when I was in nursery school and my mom was working at the Home Ec Department, so I was at WSU, one way or another, from the time I was four or five years old and all the way up to graduate school.

I discovered, as I was getting toward the end of my undergraduate degree, that I just didn't have the mathematical abilities that were necessary for physics, for example, and I got tired of breaking glassware in chemistry, so I decided maybe the sciences weren't my thing. It turned out that as an undergraduate, I was also taking a whole lot of social science classes. I found I was very, very good in psychology and sociology. I just figured they were easy.

Anyway, it worked out really well. I was a research assistant on a grant for the Department of Sociology doing research on delinquent gangs in Chicago.

Fiksdal: Was this graduate school?

McNeil: This was graduate school at WSU. The professor who had collected all the data had collected it from middle-class kids and lower-class gang kids in Chicago, so he had all this collected data. I was one of the graduate students who was hired to do an analysis of that data for my master's degree.

But during that same period, I happened upon one of the other sociology faculty members, who had gotten a whole lot of research on Alcoholics Anonymous members from the Seattle area. There were maybe 100 questionnaires, very extensive questionnaires. The graduate students who had done that work dropped out or something, I don't know, but here was all this stuff that was already done, so I decided to take that on and do that for my master's thesis. We did analysis of the success or failure of Alcoholics Anonymous. That was really the focus for me, all the way through till I got done at Evergreen. My real specialty is in addictions and recovery.

But I really wanted to focus on social psychology, not just sociology, because the teaching of it was so intertwined.

Fiksdal: Was that a field at the time?

McNeil: Not formally. What I had to do is, as a graduate student, I was majoring in both psychology and sociology. My degree as an undergraduate was in physical sciences, but my master's was in sociology. But I was already taking the psych courses because this grant that I was part of was an accelerated PhD program. You could get your master's degree in one year and a PhD in two years.

Fiksdal: Wow.

McNeil: Which was really quite a fabulous prospect. I already decided, at the end of the first year when I got my master's in sociology, that I really wanted my PhD in psychology. I had taken all of the coursework in psychology and all I had to do was do a dissertation. But I'd been going to school for six years solid, including summer school, at that point. And second year sociology graduate students also taught the intro sociology courses. I just burned out. I just couldn't take it. I took a leave of absence from WSU—essentially six months short of a year—for doing my PhD.

I applied for a job and got a job at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma in sociology. I was there for four years teaching sociology. Also, I took a sabbatical leave. I had a choice to either go back and finish my PhD—which probably would have been in sociology at that point, even though I did all the coursework for both of these departments—or I could do a sabbatical grant. I just decided I wasn't up to going back to school that way. So, I did the research on middle-class students and delinquency as a sabbatical leave, and then presented the paper on that when I got done.

I was there for four years in Tacoma. At that point, the University of Puget Sound had a policy that for all those young people, they would not give us tenure. They kept us for as long as they could, and then they'd get rid of us.

Fiksdal: For heaven's sakes.

McNeil: I had to make a decision at that point, am I going to go back to graduate school—because I was still on a leave of absence from WSU—or am I going to look for something else to do? It turned out that the University of Oregon was doing a really good research project, again on delinquency, which I could have done, but again, I just didn't want to go back to school that way.

I ended up applying for a job as a caseworker for Public Assistance here in Olympia, and I got that job.

Fiksdal: As a caseworker for Public Assistance?

McNeil: Right. I had families with dependent children as a caseload. That was the year prior to Evergreen—it was the planning year—so I was here in Olympia already for the planning year. It sounds like you were also.

Fiksdal: Yeah. Well, I'm from here.

McNeil: I didn't realize that.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Fiksdal: So, you heard about the college because you were right here in town.

McNeil: I heard about the college. I had planned to come to Evergreen, to try to get hired on to Evergreen.

Fiksdal: Oh, you did?

McNeil: During the period of time that I was at the University of Puget Sound. So ending up mysteriously in Olympia anyway during that planning year, it was just natural for me to spend a lot of time with the faculty and the administrators that were in trailers at that time.

Fiksdal: I did that, too, so you'd go out and visit and find out what they were thinking?

McNeil: It also turned out—again, these mysterious things that happened in my life timewise—that Richard Jones—his wife's parents are friends of my uncle's family in Boston, so my aunt and uncle and Suzi's parents wanted Richard and me to get together, and here we were.

As you may remember, there were 7,000 people that applied to Evergreen in that first year.

Fiksdal: No, I didn't know.

McNeil: The only way you got hired is if you had one of the faculty who was in the planning faculty to be your sponsor. Richard agreed to do that for me, so Richard watched me come through the process. Richard and I actually worked together downtown in one of the youth drop-in centers. We were counselors down there at that time.

Fiksdal: Oh, so he was already in town also.

McNeil: He was on the planning faculty.

Fiksdal: I know he was on the planning faculty, yeah. That way, you met a lot of people.

McNeil: Yeah, and that's how I got in. But there's one more piece to this. I got down to the final 50 or so that were to be hired—I don't know how many were actually hired that first year—20, maybe—but there were two of us that had essentially identical backgrounds, Carol Olexa and me. If you remember, there were no women in the planning faculty.

Fiksdal: That's right. I know that very well.

McNeil: So, they had to make a choice and I had to make a choice. I pride myself at saying, "Carol needs to have this job. I've got other options of what I can do." Carol got hired, but—another one of these mysterious things—Mary Ellen Hillaire, who was also a sociologist, got a job in Washington, D.C. with whoever the administration was, I guess the Reagan administration at that time. [It was the Nixon administration—sf]

So, all of a sudden, just before school started—just at the start of summer, actually, they did planning [when they] went out to Pack Forest—there was a hole in sociology. I was sitting right here in Olympia, and I'd gone through all the interviews, had done the whole thing. So, I got a call one day and they said, "C'mon in. You're hired."

Fiksdal: For heaven's sakes.

McNeil: After I'd already said I'm not going to get hired.

Fiksdal: Mary Hillaire must have taken a leave?

McNeil: She took a leave for two years.

Fiksdal: Oh, I didn't know that. From my perspective, I thought she was always there. It's interesting, isn't it?

McNeil: That's how I got the job.

Fiksdal: My assumption is you didn't teach together with Carol Olexa. Or did you?

McNeil: Actually, we did. We taught together the first year. It was a seven-person program.

Fiksdal: What was that program?

McNeil: It was called Individual in American Society. Willi Unsoeld was coordinator. Le Roi Smith, Bill Aldridge, Carol, Peggy Dickinson, Pete Sinclair, me. There were seven of us. As you know, that first year, we couldn't start on campus, so that program with 120 students went off to the North Cascade Wilderness to break trail for the Forest Service and live in tents out in the wilderness.

Fiksdal: One of the things I'm interested in knowing—I've interviewed Charlie Teske, but, as you know, he was a dean—so how did you choose that area? Did you have to dream it up and figure out where you were all going to go, or did someone give you a hand?

McNeil: Actually, that wasn't my first-choice program. My first-choice program was to be in one that was called Science and Art or something like that that Byron was the coordinator for. Because I have a very strong science background, a very strong science interest, and at the time, it looked like the multiplicity of my background would be a real hit for that program.

But all of a sudden, for reasons I can't remember right now, I got switched over. I think it was Willi that probably said he wanted me to be in his program, so I ended up in the program with him. I don't know how the original planning for that went.

Fiksdal: Oh, as he was the coordinator, maybe he—because he liked mountains. You were building trails?

McNeil: This is funny. We're going up there with people like Le Roi, who had never been out of Chicago, never been in the wilderness in his life, and Willi, who, of course, was total wilderness.

Fiksdal: Lived there in the wilderness.

McNeil: We knew we were going to have a lot of students who'd never been out in the wilderness and didn't have equipment. Willi says, "Look, we'll just run up to Camp Muir on Mount Rainier and pick up the sleeping bags and stuff." I said, "Willi, you can run up Mount Rainier. I'm not going to run up Mt. Rainier.

Fiksdal: No. Who's able to do that?

McNeil: I'm not sure how we ended up with all the equipment, but Willi made arrangements to get a huge Army tent and enough small other kinds of equipment that we did all our own cooking and we cleared trails for the Forest Service, and planted trees. Planted a lot of trees.

Fiksdal: How long did you do that?

McNeil: It was for two weeks.

Fiksdal: Wow, what an introduction. You retained LeRoi.

McNeil: That was Individual in American Society. We started out being out of society, and at the end of the program, we went the other way where everybody had to do some 20-student project that was an investigation really deeply internally in some social situation.

In my case, I took students and we hitchhiked to San Francisco and lived for a week in the Tenderloin.

Fiksdal: You hitchhiked with your students down to San Francisco? [laughing] That's really funny.

McNeil: Yeah. We had to get parental permission. We got the permission from the Attorney General's office.

Fiksdal: To hitchhike?

McNeil: We went in pairs. You couldn't hitchhike in Washington, so they dumped us off on the freeway outside of Portland in pairs. Then we had to meet up. Not quite as random as it sounds because since I knew we were going to do this, I took my family to San Francisco three weeks earlier and did some real reconnoitering of how we would go about dealing with things and where we would meet up. It all worked out quite nicely. We lived in the Tenderloin. We ate at the soup kitchens, and we did work for a couple of churches, volunteer work.

Fiksdal: It sounds fabulous.

McNeil: Then we hitchhiked home.

Fiksdal: Then when you back to Evergreen, did everyone report out?

McNeil: Yeah, everybody reported back on what their experience had been.

Fiksdal: How was your retention of students? Do you remember at all?

McNeil: For the next year?

Fiksdal: For that whole—because it was a year-long program.

McNeil: It was a year-long program.

Fiksdal: It started rather oddly.

McNeil: Yeah, we started with 120 students. I don't have a memory of losing enough students that it counted. We still had most of the students. It was a pretty exciting program.

Fiksdal: You didn't have a lot of time to plan it. Right?

McNeil: I'd gone to Pack Forest with the people who were doing the planning there. Willi had an apartment over on the east side of Olympia. We'd meet in his apartment quite frequently during the summer. That's probably as much time as we normally had. Normally, for putting a program together, you don't get together until spring quarter anyway.

Fiksdal: Exactly.

McNeil: You may be talking to a couple people ahead of time.

Fiksdal: I know all that sounds like plenty of time, Earle, but you were all brand new to the college.

McNeil: Yeah, we survived by the seat of our pants and nobody cared.

Fiksdal: That's right. I wanted to hear a little more about that. People who had been planning were not agreeing on very much, and there were lots of different personalities.

McNeil: You don't argue with Willi, for one thing. He had an extremely strong personality but an extremely kind, gentle man who knows how to manipulate everybody to the nth degree. [laughing] I don't remember ever having any conflicts at any time within the nature of that program.

Fiksdal: That's great.

McNeil: I remember it being a program that went along quite smoothly.

Fiksdal: He was the only one that had been on the planning faculty. Right?

McNeil: Bill Aldridge also.

Fiksdal: So, you had all these newly hired people, but ready to go because they were there because they wanted to be, of course. I understand that. Both of us know that there were programs that just fell apart.

McNeil: I truly do not remember a single conflict situation that we ever experienced.

Fiksdal: Wow, that's so fabulous.

McNeil: We were given so much freedom to do what we wanted to do, individually and collectively. We spent enough time talking about it. We had our book seminars together. We spent a lot of time being in one another's homes and apartments talking with one another.

Fiksdal: You were married. Did you have any children at the time?

McNeil: We had three children.

Fiksdal: Three already? Wow. That's a lot going on.

McNeil: Well, Sue had a lot going on. [laughter] One of the worst aspects of that—Sue would have to give you the actual information because I'm fuzzy on it—the program faculty had to meet in Seattle for some reason before we went up to the North Cascades.

Sue and the kids went with me initially to Seattle. I'm not quite sure why. But our daughter was really, really sick and had a very high temperature, and it was a very, very tough situation for Sue then to have to come back and have to deal with a really sick child. And I was going to be gone for two weeks.

Fiksdal: Exactly, and you had to be.

McNeil: And not knowing what was going to happen. Completely out of touch. There weren't any cell phones back then.

Fiksdal: No. It makes you wonder how we managed, doesn't it? It's hard to remember all that. You mentioned the trailers—and I remember that, too—as really muddy. Everybody was wearing flannel shirts. There you are. [laughing] Earle just spread his arms because he's wearing a flannel shirt. Earle, you're so funny.

In that first year of the college is when they actually started making it ready so people could use it. I remember coming out one day and there was suddenly a lawn. I just hadn't come out all day. You were here in Olympia, but you weren't out there during the planning year. What was that like experiencing a campus—

McNeil: I watched the school being built. I was only with the Department of Public Assistance for a year. It was another mysterious thing in my life. I came to Olympia. I was working for Public Assistance, but I wanted to be at Evergreen. I was still working for Public Assistance at the point where Carol got the job, and I didn't. But I couldn't stand the job in Public Assistance. It's not my personality. Working with Families with Dependent Children, there's really nothing you can do for people. They get the money that they need. At that time—you're talking 1971-72—there really weren't any resources. We're talking almost exclusively single-parent families with women. They could go to community college but there was nothing else that was available that they could be supported doing with the amount of money that they had that was barely enough to survive.

So, you ended up being a policemen. There really wasn't anything else you could do. Your job was to go and see whether or not their house was in decent shape and the kids were not being mistreated. That's about all you could do. That just wasn't something I wanted to do.

I went back up to Evergreen and I said to Charlie Teske, probably, and Merv—I probably talked to three or four different people—and I said, “I can’t stay working for Public Assistance anymore, and I don’t know what I’m going to do. I don’t have a job here, but I’m willing to come and do whatever I can for free just to do something. Other than that, I don’t know. I’ll move back to Tacoma or something and find something else to do.”

That’s what I remember now. It was at that point that Charlie said to me, “Mary Ellen Hillaire just gave notice she’s taking a leave, so we want you back in the system.”

Fiksdal: You happened to be right there.

McNeil: Right at that particular moment.

Fiksdal: Wow.

McNeil: I don’t know if it was the exact day or not.

Fiksdal: Plus, you had just offered to work for free. [laughter] Good thing that they actually did hire you. That’s really a coincidence.

McNeil: There were really a lot of pieces that came together.

Fiksdal: That’s really exciting. Good story. By then, they knew you quite well because you had been out there talking to them, plus going through all the interview process. You were right there at the right time. That’s wonderful.

McNeil: You were talking about showing up one day and there was lawn there. I remember when there was nothing but a big hole in the ground where the library is. That whole area that’s on the parkway is a big mound now with an ecological study site for years, but that’s all the tailings from the basement of the library.

Fiksdal: I didn’t know that.

McNeil: To make that mound along the parkway. At that point, it was pristine clean. People who were doing things in ecology-oriented stuff could look at that and watch what the plants and the animal transitions were over the next 30, 40 years.

Fiksdal: I know that the whole area of the campus has been thoroughly studied. We’re lucky, because it was a large chunk of land.

McNeil: What a lot of people don’t know is there used to be a couple of small streams that went through where Red Square is. The way you know that the streams are still there even though technically they were filled is you get these cracks in the brickwork that follow the old streambeds as they keep settling.

Fiksdal: Now, I’ll have to go back out there. I’ve always seen those cracks.

McNeil: I've been there long enough to know how they're filled.

Fiksdal: Very interesting. I didn't know that.

McNeil: For years and years if you just look for a stream.ⁱ

Fiksdal: That's a good story. What was Olympia like then? You were there already.

McNeil: Yeah, I was there in Olympia for a couple years before the school opened. It was a small town. I don't really remember much about Olympia. It was a small town. When I first moved to Olympia and I was working for Public Assistance, we lived over by the military bases in a housing project over there. For a short period of time, we were just renting. Then, when Evergreen opened, we moved to a house where I could just walk from here. I had students to my home a whole lot for several years there, and then of course here.

Fiksdal: Was that with potlucks?

McNeil: Yeah, potlucks and book seminars and things like that.

Fiksdal: Those were the good days when we used to do that a lot. When faculty got together, we would do that, too.

SUE: Can I interrupt you?

Fiksdal: Of course. This is Sue, Earle's wife, and she heard me asking about Olympia. She knew it better because she was right here.

SUE: Right, with three young kids. Our youngest daughter is adopted, and she's part black, so moving to Olympia with a black daughter, we got many, many stares at grocery stores, and people really standing back—not with their mouth open, but that's the feeling you got. Some wanting to come over and touch her and the whole bit.

Fiksdal: Oh, my gawd.

SUE: It was an experience that we had not expected.

McNeil: This was a very white town.

SUE: It was very white, and very conservative.

McNeil: Still is.

SUE: Again, our daughter even going through grade school and middle school, there were only three black children in her class all the way through.

Fiksdal: I don't know if you were here still at that time—in the '70s, they were still doing this—I did grow up here and I didn't know it until later on in life—there were for sale signs apparently that said "No Negroes." In my high school, there were none until I was a senior. There were no African American

people at all. The town was very conservative, and very white for a reason. [Real estate agents would not sell to black people and some signs were explicit, I learned much later.-sf]

SUE: One of the young girls who was in Kerrie's class was a Dolliver--their child had been adopted also and they just happened to be the same age.

The other black girl, again, her mother had moved into Olympia, I think, for the State, and she had married, but I think she was biracial. Those were the only ones going through on the west side.

Fiksdal: What an introduction for you.

SUE: We've learned a lot when we came to Evergreen.

Fiksdal: But you stayed, despite all of this.

SUE: Oh, yeah.

McNeil: Being in a first-year program was Le Roi, so at least it was a black faculty member with a black child. That interaction was really a very valuable experience, too.

Fiksdal: And so good for him coming from Chicago to Olympia. [laughing] Thanks, Sue. That was great.

McNeil: I wanted to add one thing about having students to our homes. I was on the far-left end of the political/social spectrum of the faculty. I was way out on the far-left end. I'd been a draft resistor and all sorts of things. [In fact, one of my students, Sandy Desner, made use of federal grant money and remodeled several buildings downtown.]

Fiksdal: That is very interesting. I think that the faculty and the students really changed this town radically in those early years.

McNeil: I'm kind of jumping ahead, but one of the reasons I decided to retire when I did—I was only 57 at the time I retired—I'd gotten my 30 years in. I don't think I had quite 30 years in. I think Barbara Smith said something about "If you don't go for a couple more years, you won't get full retirement" at two-thirds or whatever, and I said, "I'm making more than I'm going to make if I kept going for another two years, and I'm really, really tired of teaching. I'm finding students that are not wanting to do what we faculty want them to do."

I was in a core program with Pris Bowerman and Lucia Harrison. They had hired me into their program because they had taught the same program the year before, and the students had just rebelled, so they thought that maybe I could bring some stability to the program. The students just rebelled. I couldn't believe what was going on.

Fiksdal: A second time they rebelled?

McNeil: They didn't want to do what we wanted them to do. They would complain, "It's not in the program's description. This isn't the program I thought it would be." We said, "Let's read the

description and see.” We’d read the description and it would be identical to what we were doing. They didn’t want to do it.

Fiksdal: Did they expect something else? This has happened to me in more recent years.

McNeil: They thought that we were just nickeling and diming them to death. It was called something like Autobiography and Literature. We’d taken the autobiographical works of two or three really important, major people and—this is an example—we’d ask the students to break down into small groups of two or three, and each one had sections of the book, and they were to look for what we called turning points in the person’s life. What is this person writing about that you can see—sometimes big, sometimes small—that made a real difference, that got them to where they wanted to go?

The students would come back with just nothing. Just nothing. “We don’t want to do it. It’s just not worth doing. We don’t care what these people . . .” We lost 50 percent of the students. It got to the point where at the end of the first quarter, the students had done so little—not all of them, obviously, but 25 percent—had done so little, I wanted to cut credit. Pris and Lucia said, “We can’t do it. We just can’t do it. We’ve got to give them full credit.”

Fiksdal: I cut credit all the time in the last years.

McNeil: As I remember it, we got into the situation—Evergreen as a whole—where you can’t cut credit. You can’t say anything bad about a student. All you can say is, “The student has these kinds of things that they need to study more or learn more about.” You can’t say they failed at anything.

Fiksdal: I just took the credit away if they failed. I didn’t talk about it. [laughing]

McNeil: I thought we weren’t allowed to do that.

Fiksdal: That must have been in the covenant or something. Or it was two against one, or whatever, the decision.

Okay, so that’s good. Let’s think about those early years. Those students, I remember a lot of them—maybe most—had already been in college somewhere else.

McNeil: Right, and they were coming to Evergreen because in many cases, they couldn’t make it elsewhere. They needed the freedom of expression.

Okay, here’s what happened. The second year, I’m in a program. Carolyn Dobbs is the coordinator. Mark Papworth and Charlie Lyons and Maxine Mimms.

Fiksdal: Wow. A lot of strong personalities.

McNeil: This is not a program that went smoothly. [laughing] It was called Learning About Learning. We told the students, “We are awarding you 48 credits day one in the program. The only way you lose credit is if you disappear, and we will prorate the credit up to the point at which you disappeared. We

will provide a curriculum for you, but you don't have to do anything. This is your learning about learning in the most pure way possible."

You've got all of these radically different personalities and temperaments and views of life in the faculty that are there. I had one student who, the whole first quarter, did nothing but sit in his room and smoke weed. I gave him 16 Evergreen credits in contemplation.

Fiksdal: [Laughing] Oh, no! They didn't even have to write about their learning?

McNeil: They had to write their self-evaluation, and he did. And he got so bored that he became one of the best students that was in the program by the time we got done. I followed him for years after that. We kept communicating back and forth. He became a social worker, working with kids.

Fiksdal: For heaven's sakes. You just needed to let him be.

McNeil: That happened to a lot of the students in that program. We didn't require them to do anything. That same model, within years, when I taught with David Whitener and Rainer Hasenstab in the Native American Studies programs, because the Native American philosophy is support and valuing of the person. We would provide 50 percent of the curriculum and we would have the students put together 50 percent of their own individual curriculum. Again, there was nothing required, but we did provide 50 percent. I don't remember ever feeling like it was a failure. People would come around and do stuff.

Fiksdal: It's amazing. Let's go back to that Learning About Learning because I thought, from the outside, that that was a fabulous program. You know why? I was in those early years trying to teach French to whoever came, so I didn't have to have a certain number, or I wasn't told that I did. I didn't have stand-alone programs. I was just trying to teach French.

I had a student from that program, Daniel—that's all I can remember is his first name—

McNeil: I remember Daniel

Fiksdal: He had decided that he would learn to see by taking off his glasses. He also decided he would learn French. Not with me. I only met him a little later, maybe later that year or something. But he decided he would learn French by just concentrating on it. He gave it to me—I have now this record player—and he listened to records.

My whole thing at Evergreen that I would tell anybody who listened was total immersion. I would speak French to the students. They would try and figure out what I was saying. We had books. The whole idea was how I learned French when I went to France, by just hearing it all around me and having to speak, and having to interact, and having to actually do things in French.

He told me his plan and I told him he was crazy. He left and went off. Came back with the most amazing French you ever heard. Really good accent. I thought, no, you had to do something else besides this program, and he said, “No.”

McNeil: He chose to do that.

Fiksdal: He was so motivated. He loved that program. He learned to see better. He practiced all these eye exercises, and his eyes improved somehow, and then he learned French. I thought it was an amazing program because he could choose what he wanted to learn, and then delve in.

McNeil: That’s what happened. Students came in. Some of them wanted to work the program, and he just got bored, to the point where—

And we kept working with them. It’s not like we let them go and didn’t ever talk to them. We’d sit down and talk regularly. “What do you want to do?” They would come up with little bits. “Well, do that then.” That would lead to something else, and eventually, they would be fully immersed, either in what we were doing, partly or wholly, or what they wanted to do.

Fiksdal: Did you have seminars and lectures?

McNeil: Oh, yeah.

Fiksdal: They could come?

McNeil: It was a wonderful curriculum.

Fiksdal: Oh, I see. So, they could do that or not.

McNeil: Right, it was their choice.

Fiksdal: It’s like having an individual contract with no contract written down.

McNeil: Right.

Fiksdal: And a program.

McNeil: Right.

Fiksdal: Okay, I understand now.

McNeil: That’s how it worked in Native American Studies, too, the same way. As you go through the quarter, you and your faculty member are talking about what you’re doing, so that when we get to the end—one of the things I really pride myself in is how I could teach students to write self-evaluations. My students wrote very, very good self-evaluations, and I pride myself in thinking I did also.

Side comment here. The reasons my evaluations for the students were so well written—and I just went back and read some; I’ve got a whole portfolio of stuff—

Fiksdal: Oh, you kept them. I wish I had.

McNeil: There's a kind of box of mine over there. We've got a two-person bathtub in there. If you want to look at it sometime, take a look. Sue and I would bathe together in the bathtub, and I would tell her about my students. I would narrate to her and record my narration to her about my students because there was no other way I could get to it. But doing that free-association thing really led to me to being able to get into the breadth of my students' activities.

Fiksdal: Interesting. Did you give them examples of self-evaluations? How did you get them to write good self-evaluations?

McNeil: The first thing I did was I started out with some examples. Here's the kinds of things you need to look at. What do you feel really good about having done? What do you feel like you could have done better? What kinds of things gave you trouble? Those kinds of things.

I'd have them write that up. They'd write a page. The week before evaluation week, I would take them and basically correct them as an essay, and give them suggestions on where to go, and wording and grammar and stuff like that. I'd give them back to them, and then they had to come and read it to the rest of the students. We'd come here to the house, and we'd sit in that room [points], and everybody would read their self-evaluation to the rest of the group.

Fiksdal: That must have been such a wonderful—

McNeil: It really was a motivator.

Fiksdal: They knew they were going to read it out loud. But also, that gives them complete ownership when you have to read it out loud.

McNeil: That's what I mean, it's a motivation.

Fiksdal: It's strengthening and motivation.

McNeil: In fact, one of the worst things I never had to deal with one student and the rule—it was written down in the covenant of the program—you have to do your self-evaluation and read it, or you won't get credit. No matter what else you've done, if you don't do a self-evaluation, you're not going to get any credit.

Fiksdal: Oh, you lose all of the credit?

McNeil: All of the credit.

Fiksdal: Oh, my goodness. That was daring.

McNeil: There was no content without that. If it's not there in the record.

Fiksdal: But you have lots of evidence. You have their seminar participation [for an evaluation of the student—sf].

McNeil: I had my evaluation of them in the record, but if the student doesn't do a self-evaluation, there's this big hole.

Fiksdal: Oh, in that record. I see.

McNeil: There's their self-evaluation in the formal record in the Registrar's Office. One year, I had one young woman that simply said she wasn't going to do it and I said I won't give you credit. Of course, the program blew up. In the end, I think she did it. [laughing] It was a really nasty scene for awhile.

Fiksdal: Everyone you taught with, you put this into the covenant? After that first whatever couple of years, you decided to do that and then it was always in your covenant?

McNeil: I don't remember if it was always in the covenant, but it was pretty regular. I was a stickler about that.

Fiksdal: I'm sorry I never heard about it. I had one program where that was in our covenant, I remember. I had a student who disappeared in the last three weeks of the quarter, but he had done just fine up until then. But it was in our covenant, and I struggled with it. I felt like it was this huge ethical issue for me to work through. I talked to my colleagues, and they said, "We have to stick to the covenant," and I didn't want to. But I did. I gave him no credit. Luckily, it was just one quarter, but that was awful.

McNeil: I had the same thing happen. I did have that happen once. She was a good student. Did everything up except I needed her self-evaluation at the end of last quarter. She was working at Home Depot. She just disappeared, but I knew where she was working. I went and talked to her, and I said, "Look, sit down with me and we'll talk this through. I don't want to not give you credit, but I can't give you credit if you don't do it."

A couple of other students in the program were friends of hers, and they also said, "She just doesn't want to do it. She's not going to do it, and she doesn't care whether she gets the credit or not. She's going to change jobs and become a person holding signs, a traffic control person at construction sites and she's going to get \$40, \$50 an hour."

Fiksdal: It is well paying but it's off and on.

McNeil: "She doesn't care whether she gets the credits."

Fiksdal: Wow.

McNeil: I really wanted to sit with her. "Just finish it up." She was a good student. I liked her a lot.

Fiksdal: Yeah. We've talked a little about the first two programs. I don't want you to go through every program or anything, but let's take a period of—I don't know what would be easiest for you—five years or 10?

RECORDER TURNED OFF AND ON

Fiksdal: Okay, we're back.

McNeil: What we have here for my retirement, Sue made up this list of all the programs that I had taught, and the faculty that I taught with, and the name of the program.

Fiksdal: It's a whole poster, a real poster.

McNeil: There's Willi, Bill, Le Roi, Carol, Peggy Dickinson oh and Pete Sinclair. [Earle's first program-sf]ⁱⁱ

Fiksdal: What can you tell me about Bill Aldridge? I had tried to interview him, but his memory had left him. I would love to know more about Bill.

McNeil: Bill had a really, really awful experience at Evergreen, and it put him off so much—although he kept teaching for a couple of years—that he came to the point where he wanted to have absolutely nothing to do with anybody that had anything to do with Evergreen.

He and I had been absolutely the best of friends for 20 years. I don't think he ever formally told me to get lost, but we just drifted apart. Probably the last one, he and Tom Foote were really close and they drifted apart, too. You don't want to put this in your story but . . .

Fiksdal: It's all right. I think we need to know.

McNeil: I'll tell you what it is. He and I built a cabin for him—remodeled an old chicken coop—on 20 acres down by Littlerock.

Fiksdal: I've been there. That's where I went to interview him.

McNeil: He and I built that or remodeled it. Bill was kind of known as a guy that was quite the lady's man. A woman charged him with sexual harassment—not one of his students, but an older woman that he had been dating for quite some time actually—and charged him formally at Evergreen. The college investigated and found he had done nothing wrong.

But the college was still running scared, so they told Bill, "We won't do anything, but the one thing you cannot do is you can never have a student in your office with the door closed. You must keep your door open."

Bill, being the psychologist that he is—I had the same kind of issues for me—"I can't do my job with the door open. The kinds of things we're talking to students about are not things that can be overheard by other people."

It scared me, too. I've always closed my door anyway if I had a female student in there who was telling me some really, really personal stuff. That's what we did. But Bill tolerated it for a while until he just couldn't take it anymore and he left.ⁱⁱⁱ

Fiksdal: I thought, too, that early on, he was hired the same year you were, in '71, for the first year of the college.

McNeil: Bill was in the planning faculty.

Fiksdal: Oh, he was in the planning faculty. I don't remember exactly what it was that he wanted to be able to do, but I think it had to do with counseling students; that that would be part of the job.

McNeil: Yeah.

Fiksdal: But people who are not psychologists didn't want to handle that.

McNeil: Right.

Fiksdal: So, I understood that one of the issues early on for him was that he didn't get his way—it just didn't get adopted—and he felt that it was really quite important. I think all of us—at least everyone I knew in those early years—were all struggling, because I wasn't trained to know—I didn't have any trouble having people talk to me, but what to say, and how to ease them out [of the office] sometimes. They took up a lot of our time. Let's just put it that way.

McNeil: Even at that, you were well along the line of being able to have that kind of communication with students.

Fiksdal: Yes, I could.

McNeil: After all, language area, English area, all of the humanities areas, people tended to be pretty good as interpersonal folks. Not entirely. [laughing] It's quite a bit different than being a physicist or a chemist.

Fiksdal: That's true.

McNeil: That's where the real difficulties were. I don't recall that actually being an issue with Bill, but it's certainly possible.

McNeil: So, we were looking at this poster [of my programs and teaching partners].

Fiksdal: Yeah, this is wonderful. Let's look again. We could talk about this section first, until 1975. This was really a time of maximum change, I would say.

McNeil: Yeah.

Fiksdal: Large programs still.

McNeil: There's a whole strange piece of this [looking at the poster]. This is where I had my brain tumor.

Fiksdal: Oh, in '76.

McNeil: Yeah, so my whole life changed right here—in many ways, anyway.

Fiksdal: Yes.

McNeil: This was an interesting situation, and then we'll go back to here. In this program, one of the students had asked me if I would be willing to teach a program that was very heavily centered on the actual helping relationship activity. Le Roi was able to do that, but my training wasn't really strong enough to actually—I had a strong training in academic psychology, but in terms of actually leading student teaching of counseling skills, I didn't feel I was really strong.

Fiksdal: Was that Le Roi's field?

McNeil: He was a clinical psychologist.

Fiksdal: I didn't even remember what his field was.

McNeil: But one of the students back in this program had asked if I would teach a program that—50 percent of it would be hands-on counseling skills. I said, "Sure, why not?" By the time Christmas came, toward the end of this first quarter, I was having brain surgery. But the college had allowed me to hire a social worker to work with me. Le Roi had to do it on his own. Actually, there was a program where we would have two parallel programs. We would do lectures together, but other than that, we were totally independent. He had his 20 students, and I had my 20 students, plus I had—I don't remember her name right now.

Fiksdal: Some help. What happened with your brain tumor? You knew you had it, or was it sudden? I don't know the story.

McNeil: I just finished my autobiography about that. Do you want to read that someday? I'll ship it to you. It's only seven pages long.

I had what was called an acoustic neuroma. It's a very slow-growing tumor that grows out of your acoustic nerve. And as it grows, it starts to incorporate the facial nerve, because the two of them to through your skull at the same point. It's on the inside of your skull. It's considered a brain tumor, although technically, it's not on the brain. As it grows larger, it starts to affect your ability to swallow, your ability to breathe. It starts to incorporate blood vessels in your brainstem. It can get really nasty.

When mine was discovered, I'd already been deaf in one ear for 15 years. There are all sorts of stories there, too, which is in my autobiography. I had a hole in my eardrum for 15 years from an earlier surgery that was supposed to correct it, and it didn't, because they didn't know much about acoustic neuromas back then.

I had hired Sharon [last name?] to work with me in this program. In November, I didn't even know I had an acoustic neuroma at that point. But in February, I'd been swimming with my kids, and I got water in the ear, and got an ear infection. I went to the ENT and he said, "We can patch that." Okay, but I didn't go back in until November. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Oh, gawd. Okay, so November of '76?

McNeil: '76.

Fiksdal: Yeah, because that's the Helping Relationship program. That was November of that program, really early on.

McNeil: The first quarter of a year-long program. I went in in November and they said, "South Sound Radiology just got a new X-ray machine, and they just got a new technician this last month, and they need a head to X-ray to train the technician. I want to check out and make sure there's nothing else, because you've had that hole in your ear so long that the skin sometimes comes in and we'd have to clean it out."

The next day, I go in. They do the X-ray, and he calls me up and he says, "You need to sit down. We need to talk. There's this mass that's just off the corner of the X-ray and we need to deal with it. I'm going to have a neurosurgeon or a neurologist look at this, so I did the tests, which were just awful."

At this point, we're into evaluation week, and I just came out of the hospital having this super-toxic stuff that they used to use to do brain scans. I couldn't stand up. I couldn't walk hardly. Could barely talk. I had a couch in my office that I had made years before that normally the students would sit on, and I'd sit in my chair and talk to them. I had to lie down on the couch to do my evaluation conferences with them.

Fiksdal: But you did.

McNeil: And I did it. As far as I can tell, it went okay. I don't remember anything except laying on the couch.

Fiksdal: This was after a brain scan, not the operation.

McNeil: It was after a brain scan, and I'm going to have the brain surgery done December 30. But Sharon agrees I'm not coming back for winter quarter. There's no way I'm coming back after going in there for 9 ½ hours and scrambling my brains. She agrees to leave her job and teach my 20 students fulltime, with Le Roi's help.

So, having Le Roi there and having her there came together. As I healed during winter quarter, I'd go back in occasionally. I was still having trouble talking and had facial paralysis. Still having trouble walking, but I would go in occasionally. By the time spring quarter came, I was able to go back in.

Fiksdal: I really remember that. I remember seeing you, how we were all so happy you made it. You were fine. You could do everything. That was so exciting.

McNeil: I'm okay.

Fiksdal: I guess I had thought it was a stroke. In my memory, I just must have forgotten what the actual—

McNeil: It had gotten big enough that when I had the neurosurgeon look at it, he said, “We’ve got to deal with this now because it’s starting to incorporate your brainstem, it’s incorporating some blood vessels. I don’t know how long it will go, but sometimes it can go fast and sometimes they don’t, but we’ve got to do it.”

It turns out when I went to the ENT and he told me that I was going to have to have this looked at, it just so happens that that summer, the head of neurosurgery from the University of California at UCLA has just moved his family to Olympia because he wants to raise his children in a safe environment, and he’s an expert in dealing with these things.

Fiksdal: Oh, my gosh.

McNeil: It always makes me shiver every time I think about the timing of this.

Fiksdal: Yes, this is another piece of the timing.

McNeil: So, if I’d have gone in February, gawd only knows. They would still take out the tumor probably waiting till November, and then getting the water in my ear back in February, because I had a hole in my ear for those 15 years in between high school and then, when I went swimming, first of all, I didn’t generally put my head under the water, but I always put an earplug in this ear because of the hole in my ear. I knew I had it there.

That day, we came out to the college. We’d just built the bathroom. We had the toilet in, but we didn’t have the shower or the bathtub or the walls insulated. We’re talking February, so it’s really cold, so we’d go up to the college to swim and shower. The boys and I came out of the shower, and I had the earplug in my left hand, and my older son says, “I challenge you to swim under water and see who can swim the farthest.” I put the earplug in the wrong ear.

Fiksdal: Oh, no.

McNeil: I swam under water, and that’s why I got the water in the ear in the first place. If I hadn’t gotten the water in the ear in the first place, I never would have known that that the tumor was there until it was too late to do anything about it. If I didn’t wait until November. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Luckily, you waited, because you got the best surgeon.

McNeil: Yeah.

Fiksdal: You’re ready for your autobiography. Where is the turning point, Earle? Your turning points are just very clear.

McNeil: My whole life is a series of coincidences.

Fiksdal: Going back. When you first came—'71-'72—you taught with Le Roi. Had you thought you wanted to teach again together, or you just happened to?

McNeil: We were really good friends. After all, he had a black child. We had a black child. We did a lot of things together. We went to the beach together and the kids played together.

Fiksdal: Did you plan this that far out?

McNeil: We didn't plan it from all the way back. There really wasn't any planning on that until the students here—"Let's do this." "Can you do this with us next year?" Then I talked to Le Roi and said, "I'm feeling a little uncomfortable about this. I can do more of the social psychology part, but if you can teach the more formal parts of psychological theory and personality, we can do a whole lot of things together." That's how we got together. I'm glad I could hire somebody, and the college allowed me to hire.

Fiksdal: You couldn't teach, yeah.

McNeil: But we still need the backdrop here.

Fiksdal: Yeah, okay. We're looking at the poster together and one of the things I'm really noticing is that from '71 to '76—except for one year when you did contracts—you're teaching these big programs. Lots of faculty.

McNeil: Right.

Fiksdal: After that, I don't see so many names.

McNeil: You do here. In Learning About Learning, there were—

Fiksdal: Here's a big program in '86, but basically, you're teaching with one, two other people.

McNeil: I was academic advisor for three years here.

Fiksdal: Three years you did academic advising?

McNeil: I did academic advisor here.^{iv} In this year, I was doing Helping Relationships [pointing at poster of programs taught-sf]. I actually hired one of my former students for free to come in and work with me. Here, I was on sabbatical leave.

Fiksdal: I see two years of contracts, one early on. Tell us about '74-'75 contracts. What was going on with that? I don't remember people doing only contracts, but obviously, they were.

McNeil: I guess some of us had to.

Fiksdal: They asked you?

McNeil: They pointed out that there were all these students that are failing elsewhere. A lot of them want to do stuff, but they don't want to do standard stuff. They don't want to be channeled. We're talking about students who were doing curriculum that was hard to pin down at that point. Fortunately,

for whatever reason, because we were doing these narrative evaluations, most of them got jobs, even though their curriculum backgrounds were really strange. But you could see what this student was like by all the narrative evaluations.

At that point, I don't remember specifically, but I'm sure what happened is I just simply agreed to go along with it. It was fine.

Fiksdal: You were probably asked to do it.

McNeil: I didn't have any problems with it.

Fiksdal: I never did that for even one quarter, doing only contracts. I did contracts all the time, on top of what I was teaching.

McNeil: Oh, yeah, individually you'd have one or two students.

Fiksdal: Always. Interesting.

McNeil: But those were full, 22 students doing contracts, and you'd have to track them, and you'd have to make sure most of them—a lot of them were doing internships of one kind or another.

Fiksdal: You remember having 24 probably.

McNeil: Probably, yeah.

Fiksdal: Just wondering.

McNeil: They kept raising the total. I think 22.

Fiksdal: It did keep going up. I know. I think that we definitely started with 15 or something. Or who cared? It just didn't matter.

McNeil: Right.

Fiksdal: I don't know if you want to keep talking. I'm just going to ask another question.

McNeil: I'm ready.

Fiksdal: I'm just interested in all of this. You'll talk forever. [laughing]

McNeil: I can talk forever.

Fiksdal: Me, too!

McNeil: Heesoon used to get upset with me when she'd ask me to come do lectures about addictions, because I would go on forever. "You've got to give me at least two days, two hours each or I don't do it." [laughter]

Fiksdal: I can see in one way understand why they needed you for contracts for a whole year, especially internships, because psychology has always been a very big interest.

McNeil: It was a major curriculum at Evergreen.

Fiksdal: We used to joke—I don't know if you were joking, too, because you were part of it—that basically we could run the college at an excess of students if we just hired more psychologists.

[laughing]

McNeil: I know. We used to argue that a lot. What did they do? They hired a psychologist—I can't remember her name right now [Carrie Margolin]—who is a statistical psychologist, who does experimental psychology, and the students didn't want to do experimental psychology. They wanted to do counseling psychology.

Fiksdal: Yeah, that was the biggest thing was counseling.

McNeil: We kept arguing. "You've got a real problem here, folks. You can't split the resources."

Fiksdal: I remember it was hard to get Heesoon [Jun] hired, wasn't it?

McNeil: There's some interesting history there, too. If you look here—Human Health and Behavior with Heesoon—

Fiksdal: Here is 1989-90, yeah.

McNeil: What happened was that Heesoon was hired—she was teaching at Centralia Community College at the time. I don't remember if I went down there and taught for a year with her, and then she came up here and taught for a year with me, or whether it was the other way around. I don't remember which way it worked right now. But we taught together for one quarter down in Centralia College and one year at here.

Fiksdal: At Centralia you got to team teach?

McNeil: Yeah.

Fiksdal: I didn't know that. I didn't know they did that. Fabulous.

McNeil: Yeah. There was a Human Sexuality course was the title of it. Teaching at a community college is really kind of touchy.

Fiksdal: I bet.

McNeil: Because I was teaching about homosexuality. I was teaching about transsexuality. I was bringing stuff in that was really very graphic. I wanted to push the students. I'd been a trans-dresser forever. [laughing] Not anymore.

Fiksdal: I didn't know that.

McNeil: Yeah. One year—Sue? What was the event? Was it the big Halloween party when I was at Evergreen cross-dressed? And George Freeman and I were having a good time together? [laughter]

SUE: No, George wasn't involved. When you dressed up, you mean, and came down the stairs? No, it wasn't George. It was . . . who was the man who had a bald head?

Fiksdal: Was he a psychologist?

SUE: No. I'm trying to remember. I think he was on the staff, wasn't he?

McNeil: I don't remember.

SUE: But he came down as Jean Luc Picard, and he had a *Star Trek* shirt on and everything. Earle came down dressed as a woman. They came down the stairs of the library.

Fiksdal: In the library lobby?

SUE: They started on the balcony. I think it was just a Halloween thing that they were doing. They had a lot more parties and things like that in the early days.

Fiksdal: Yeah, in the early years, that's really true.

SUE: Now, I guess they don't even have the stairway there anymore is what we have heard.

McNeil: I cross-dressed sometimes when I went to Heesoon's class, too.

SUE: Yeah. Heesoon cross-dressed. Do you know her?

Fiksdal: Oh, yeah.

McNeil: A woman can't cross dress.

Fiksdal: I know. She always looked fabulous. She uses her hands in a certain way, too. She's very feminine.

McNeil: I walk and talk different when I cross dress. Heesoon says I carry a feminine side. For a while, I had a beard. [laughing] Part of the year, when I went to Centralia, we both had a beard and cross dressed. It really freaked the students out. But we worked them real hard.

Fiksdal: That's interesting. First of all, I didn't know that about you, and that's great. Heesoon, I know, always had her own private practice as well as teaching, so she was just a—

McNeil: She still has a private practice.

Fiksdal: She is just an amazing—has a huge capacity for work, when you think about it. Because to me, teaching is really a lot of work on its own. You met her before all of this, and that's why you taught together?

McNeil: I was her main advocate for getting hired after the year that she taught as an exchange faculty, and after the year that I taught as an exchange faculty. That's what happened.

Fiksdal: Oh, I'm remembering this exchanging. Barbara Smith started that.

McNeil: I don't even know how it's on there now. After that, then I was her main advocate for getting hired. One year it was between her and George, and George got hired. Then the next year, Heesoon got hired.

Fiksdal: I remember Carrie Margolin was against the hire because she wanted PhDs in psychology, but this was a completely different kind of hire, but she didn't see the value for some reason.

McNeil: Carrie was also quite unhappy with the rest of us because we're all clinical psychologists. [laughing] She wanted more experimental psychologists. She and George were actually pretty good friends, but there was always this tension between—she wanted more students, and the students didn't want to go over there, so we tried to work her in around the edges.

Fiksdal: I taught with her one year in a full, year-long program. Psychology, we've always had, I don't know, not enough of the right kind of people. When I was a dean of Evening and Weekend Studies—what was Parttime Studies back then—

I was in the deanery, so maybe you remember that from '96 to 2001. Anyway, I had to make sure there were enough psychologists to teach the three required course students needed to get into graduate school.

McNeil: When George Freeman was hired, it took a year before he finally got his feet on the ground and was able to do the job very well. He specialized in issues between races, conflicts.

Fiksdal: Yeah, he did fabulous work in that. For some reason, I just remember being in his seminar one time. Probably I was observing because I did this big seminar study. I just randomly chose faculty and asked if I could come in, and then recorded. But he taught me a lot by just observing. It was very interesting work. He worked with the notion of allies, and I thought that was very good.

McNeil: I'll give you one other little piece that was always a shock to me. It may or may not in its own way fit in here. On the writing of evaluations for students, like I said, I felt that I did one of the best jobs.

Fiksdal: It sounds like it.

McNeil: And I worked with a lot of my faculty colleagues to help them get it right, too. The biggest shock for me came when Charlie [McCann] became a faculty member. One day, I was talking with him—I was in his office—and he was writing evaluations. I went there and talked to him and saw his evaluations he had written for students. "This student either did or did not everything or most of what this program description is about."

That's it. [whispering] "Charlie, what are you doing?" "Hey, it's all in the program description. I don't need to say anything. I just have to tell them whether they did it or not." That was it.

Fiksdal: Wow.

McNeil: I never quite recovered from that. [laughing]

When he interviewed me for the job the first time, I was warned by Bill and Merv, “When you get in Charlie’s office and it appears that he’s fallen asleep, don’t think that he’s fallen asleep. He’s really listening.” I was really on my toes and, yeah, he kind of blurs out particularly as he was hiring us.

He and I and some of the retired faculty and a couple staff members had breakfast—until this Covid thing hit—once every month. Charlie was part of that until he passed away.

Fiksdal: I’m glad to know that.

Fiksdal: We should talk more about Charlie McCann, because I don’t know if anyone has interviewed him. What did you think about him as the President of the college? How much did he interact with you?

McNeil: I always thought he was a good President. He wasn’t the kind of guy that was out there always manipulating stuff. I think, particularly in those early years, you have to remember the main job of the President was to keep the Legislature off of us.

Fiksdal: That’s right. And he did a terrific job.

McNeil: Between him and Dan Evans, those are the two that kept Evergreen going.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

McNeil: If we hadn’t hired Dan Evans, we’d have been shut down there, too. But Charlie worked to keep the Legislature on track and do a whole lot with all the other schools in the state. That was his main job was making sure that Evergreen was respected, and Evergreen’s curriculum was understood, enough as it could be at that time. [laughing] Not so much with the faculty, but that really wasn’t his job. He was supposed to be outside of the college.

Fiksdal: That’s a good point. That’s always the job of all of our Presidents, in fact. But in that planning year, it was interesting because he envisioned the college to be mostly individual contracts.

McNeil: Hmm. I didn’t know that.

Fiksdal: He made sure that it was part of the curriculum. But when the rest of the faculty didn’t want to do that, he apparently did not stand in the way, which was laudable, I think.

He was very shy if ever we would get invited maybe to his house. One time I went, my husband went, too, and he said, “Well, I had a really nice conversation with a guy who was hiding behind a big plant.” I said, “What?” He was telling me as we were leaving, and I turned around, and it was Charlie McCann. [laughing] I thought it was really funny. He was comfortable talking to someone who wasn’t on the faculty.

McNeil: At breakfasts, he was as much a part as anybody.

Fiksdal: That's good. I'm glad that relationship continued. Who else do you remember in administration in those early years? Who was the Provost? I can't remember.

McNeil: Barbara Smith was Provost for quite a while.

Fiksdal: Before that.

McNeil: Let's see . . . we had like four Vice Presidents and Provosts in the early years. I don't remember names that well.

Fiksdal: If they weren't memorable to you then—

McNeil: Byron Youtz was early, early.

Fiksdal: Yeah, Byron was early, but not the earliest.

McNeil: He was not the earliest because he was a faculty member for several years.

Fiksdal: Right.

SUE: Merv Cadwallader.

Fiksdal: Oh, yeah, Merv. Thank you.

McNeil: Who were the other Vice Presidents in the early years, Sue?

SUE: Where was Shoben? There was a Shoben and Merv Cadwallader.

Fiksdal: He was a dean. He was a founding dean.

McNeil: Joe Shoben.

Fiksdal: Joe Shoben. That's who it was. I think he was the first.

McNeil: Shoben got moved out. He was kind of extraneous to the college. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Oh, interesting.

McNeil: I don't remember what all the situations were. I remember one year, all of a sudden, Joe wasn't there anymore.

SUE: Where did Patrick Hill come in?

Fiksdal: That was later. It just sounds like in talking to you that the administration wasn't really a big part of what you were doing. It was teaching, and all the colleagues, and the students.

McNeil: Right. It wasn't until I became the Director of Academic Advising that I really had much to do with the administration. At that point, it was mostly with Barbara Smith and with—Sue, who was the Vice President when I was Academic Advisor?

SUE: Patrick Hill.

Fiksdal: Oh, Patrick Hill. Why did you become Director of Academic Advising?

McNeil: That's what we did. Faculty rotated in and out of that position.

Fiksdal: As Director?

McNeil: Yeah.

Fiksdal: I don't remember that.

McNeil: Yeah, we just rotated in. Russ Fox was in there for a couple years. I was in there for three years. I don't remember, a couple other people rotated in and out of there.

Fiksdal: Was that an enjoyable period for you? You were there three years.

McNeil: It could have been worse. [laughing]

Fiksdal: You weren't teaching.

McNeil: There were two events. One was you had to deal with the faculty, which I never enjoyed very much as an administrator, because my job as Director of Academic Advising was to manage the academic fairs.

Fiksdal: Oh, so you had to get people to come.

McNeil: Your job was to make sure that the faculty were there, and the faculty were doing their job talking with students, and there were faculty who just weren't doing it. I had one faculty member that I had to have it out with one time. I may be wrong about that. One of the faculty just didn't show up.

I really got bummed out trying to get people there. At one point, Barbara Smith said something to me about what I was supposed to be doing and how I wasn't doing my job, and I got so mad at her. I was standing in the hallway outside of her office screaming at her about how she didn't have a clue what was going on. Until she sat down and talked with me in person—she had no right to be talking to me this way. We got through it. Barbara has been a friend for many, many years. When I was no longer in Academic Advising and she was no longer a dean, we got along just fine.

The other was after my secretary for Academic Advising, Chris Labertie, got hired by Patrick to be his secretary two weeks before the academic fair and wanted her to move up to his office immediately.

Fiksdal: Oh, no.

McNeil: I went ballistic. You cannot believe. This is a guy who grew up in a faculty/administrative setting. Administrators, to me, are just people, and I don't think about saving my job. First of all, you don't fire faculty anyway unless they're having sex with their student, or don't write their evaluations.

Fiksdal: Or don't come to work.

McNeil: They might not come to work and still get hired. [laughter] I knew I was doing everything really good as a faculty member all the way along, so there was no way anybody was going to fire me without a big fight. Again, it's one of these cases when I stood in the hallway in front of Patrick's office

upstairs on the third floor and I just laid him out. And he rescinded. I don't think Chris ever left. Did Chris ever go up to Patrick's office?

SUE: I think after the academic fair, yeah.

McNeil: Not while I was Academic Advisor. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Yeah, you have to have your support when you need it.

McNeil: But Patrick and I became good friends, too. [laughter] After I got out of that job, I was a real friend.

Fiksdal: I can't imagine you yelling at someone. I wish I had been around as a fly on the wall.

McNeil: I need to stop.

Fiksdal: You always seemed very calm—okay, let's stop.

ⁱ In the first years after the school moved administration and faculty offices from the trailers to the library one of the trailers was converted to be used as the day care center (I think mostly for student children? I don't know how it was staffed or run). At some point in the early 80s I think it was clear that something larger and more suitable was needed. The college had an empty single-family house on Driftwood road north of the campus. It had been used only for miscellaneous storage. So it was decided to convert it into a daycare center. But there were several things that had to be remodeled to bring it up to code. One big room had only one door and had to have two. There was only one exit door and there had to be one added to the rear of the building. Various electrical things, like new baseboard heat, had to be added. A fence needed to be added around the yard. The wiring was all hired out but with my home building experiences I could do all the physical structural remodeling. So I cut a new door between the big room and the hallway, cut open the back exterior wall and added a door. The fence was a big job. For reasons I don't remember, I asked Pete Pugh - I don't remember what his job on the staff was at Evergreen - if he was interested in helping. He was. One weekend he and his wife and children and Sue and ours spent the time digging post holes and stringing wood and wire. I don't remember how we got the supplies. I think the building is no longer used for daycare but have no idea when it was changed nor what it has been used for since.

ⁱⁱ In the first few years we did not give anything resembling course credits. The narrative evaluation was supposed to give anyone who wanted it enough information to make the translation. Didn't work. We ended up having to write letters to schools, graduate programs and professional groups our students wanted to transfer to or get hired by. It was a real stretch to think someone on a selection committee would be willing to read many pages of narrative and try to figure out how the student's work related to traditional needs. It was amazing it worked as well as it did but was very cumbersome and time consuming. one day in some sort of discussion Merv, I think jokingly, said "Why don't we just do the best we can and add what we consider course equivalences at the end of the evaluation". Initially we resisted. It just felt like selling out the whole core philosophy of the Evergreen model. But, I think the administration said we just had to do it. So....It worked ok even if I had to sometimes give credit for "Evergreen experiential experience".

ⁱⁱⁱ At some point in the early 80s it became clear that occasionally a faculty member would run afoul of the administration for some reason. If the administration decided to do some sort of investigation or legal action, they had the power of the State attorney general's office to call on at no cost to the college. On the other hand, a faculty member had no recourse for even checking out possibilities of legal defense without paying for it themselves at a cost of a couple hundred dollars. At that time there was no

faculty union or other peer support. So a small group of us decided to try to raise money by asking faculty to voluntarily donate to a legal fund. I only remember two of the others - Craig Carlson and John Filmore. Over a couple of years, we had maybe 25 faculty donate. We raised, I think, a thousand or so dollars. We made no judgement on the nature of the faculty's behavior or the issue. We had only one point in our written position statement and that was to provide the cost of one attorney interview to help the faculty member assess options. I think we had two cases we helped. I don't recall the issues. When I retired, the faculty was starting to develop the process for creating a faculty union. I turned over the leadership and the money to John Filmer. I think once the union came into being he gave the money to them.

^{iv} For reasons I don't remember except that as a sociologist who had done some research, I had some skills. I ended up writing two accreditation reports for the social science area. One at tenth year and one the year I retired. In fact, my last quarter, spring of 1999, I had already formally retired. But my winter quarter students needed someone to teach statistics and personality theory to finish a psychology "major". I added that teaching half time and Barbara Smith hired me half time to do the accreditation report. I had to develop a questionnaire to give students in several selected programs. Also interview faculty in history and psych - I was the only sociologist there by that time - all together to tell the committee what we considered the strengths and limitations of the curriculum and make suggestions for changes. Having done the same for the first review I could compare the two. Turned out little had changed over all the years in terms of issues. Not enough counseling psych and especially no way for students to be sure what they needed one year and program to the next would be available since faculty were expected to move around and not just teach in the same academic area every year. Remember how Heesoon had to fight the deans to stay teaching psychology, often by herself, to give the students what she knew they needed? Of course, there was no sociology except what little I provided.