

**Sarah Ryan**  
**Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
**January 5, 2022**

**FINAL**

**Fiksdal:** Hello, Sarah. I'm Susan Fiksdal. I'm interviewing Sarah Ryan for Evergreen's oral history project. It's January 5, 2021. Happy New Year.

**Ryan:** Happy New Year.

**Fiksdal:** What we're going to do is start with your childhood. I just want to know a little bit about where you grew up. Maybe you could talk about what your parents did, siblings. What we're interested in is how you developed your interests over time and how those interests might have been affected by high school, work, and college.

**Ryan:** Okay. I'll go a little bit back. I didn't grow up in one place. I lived with my parents in Connecticut until I was 13, when my mother died, and my father kind of went crazy and we had to move in with different relatives over the next four years or so.

But my father worked in insurance in New York City and commuted. My mother was the daughter of a steelworker, who was a big reader and writer and got a college scholarship to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, when she was in high school. I think she started college and the war started, and in a fit of patriotism, she quit and joined the Coast Guard. She did writing for the Coast Guard during the war.

**Fiksdal:** I have to interrupt because when you hear Oxford, Mississippi—

**Ryan:** Oxford, Ohio. I think it's a partly privatized state college there, but it probably wasn't then. My father always led us to believe he was a college graduate, but I didn't find out until long after he was gone that he dropped out. But he had a kind of Jesuit high school education that was very good. I think he went to the University of Texas at Austin for a little bit, and then dropped out. I don't know why he dropped out, but probably he was a little more adventurous than college wanted him to be, and I followed that pattern. [laughing]

We moved and ended up living with various relatives in North Carolina and Florida, and I ended up getting a scholarship in high school to Florida State University. I was a good student. I got As, but I wasn't really engaged about anything when I was a younger child.

Although I do remember having some very formative experiences in elementary school and middle school about politics and social justice. We had a fourth-grade teacher named Mr. Burnbaum,

who educated us about the Civil Rights Movement, and engaged our childhood sense of empathy to tell the story of the lunch counter sit-ins and the physical abuse that the students endured. Then I had a church retreat in middle school that was also totally focused on the Civil Rights Movement.

**Fiksdal:** Catholic also?

**Ryan:** No, it was Congregational, and they're a very progressive denomination that was very involved in funding and sponsoring and sending people to civil rights things.

**Fiksdal:** You did really well in high school to get a scholarship for college. I'm just wondering how you managed that. You had had quite a disrupted life. Adolescence is hard enough without everything that happened to you. Were your relatives really kind and generous? Did you have to make your own way?

**Ryan:** None of them really wanted to have us. It was like a family bounce-around foster system. And they'd all had trials and tribulations of their own.

School was the only thing I was good at and always had been. But it was too easy, and I could get high grades without doing a lot of homework. I was a good guesser, and I listened in class. [laughing] And I was a reader on my own as well, so it was all too easy, and it was a very rude shock when I got to Florida State and I had to study. That was a very rude shock. I got the scholarship because I was a good, standardized test taker.

**Fiksdal:** What do you think changed you in college? How did you decide on a major? That usually is something that you have to do, and it's hard to figure out.

**Ryan:** I dropped out before that was necessary. [laughing] Just to pursue political activism. And I just wasn't motivated about anything in particular in college, so I left. I made a few stabs at going back to learn something practical for work. I made a stab at medical technology, but then I found out that nobody had ever graduated from the program while working fulltime, and I couldn't figure out how to do it.

I dropped that, and then I took various courses. I even took some machine shop courses at Shoreline Community College when I was working in Seattle. Those were interesting, but I really didn't want to do the work.

**Fiksdal:** You were last in Florida. You dropped out of college, and how you're talking about Seattle. That's a really long way.

**Ryan:** A really long time, yes. What happened was I was a member of this socialist organization, the Socialist Workers Party, and they were very big on moving people around to hotspots, and it also provided me the opportunity to move around because I did not like Florida.

I moved to Atlanta in '73. Oh, my picture was on the front page of some newspapers for the first women's national abortion rights march in an AP photo that my father, who was still alive at the time, saw and freaked out about. But I moved to Atlanta and worked as a waitress and in Admissions Office staff at Georgia State University. Then I moved to D.C. and worked at George Washington University in the Admissions Office. Moved to New York and worked for the Socialist print shop there.

Then my boyfriend and I moved to Seattle. We'd been living in New York. They would pay what they called subsistence wages, but it was basically minimum wage. You could do it at the time in New York because it was the height of the financial crisis and the bad old days, and you could still find cheap apartments in the city. But the way I put it was your infrastructure would crumble after. Your teeth were never cleaned, and your sheets and towels were wearing out.

**Fiksdal:** Tough to be poor. Really tough.

**Ryan:** We moved to Seattle, and both got jobs in the printing industry for a while. I eventually had a high-wage printing job in Seattle. I did a Consumer Price Index on it one time. I got up to \$13 an hour in 1983, and when I do a CPI on that, that's something like \$34 an hour now.

**Fiksdal:** Wow. It's amazing how much people can make.

**Ryan:** They could, but my step-grandson probably makes about the same \$13 an hour, maybe \$15, 30 or 40 years later.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, gosh.

**Ryan:** In the printing industry.

**Fiksdal:** So, things have really changed. Things have digitized. There are all these new technologies.

**Ryan:** Yeah, but there's a lot of the same old grunt work. And it's dangerous and a bit toxic, and so I was finally burnt out on that. I had taken the Post Office test a couple of times over the years and I finally got a really good score and decided to switch out. I couldn't see being a woman—I was running large presses and I kept seeing the guys who were in their fifties changing jobs and getting busted right back down to the bottom of the wage scale again.

**Fiksdal:** They were changing jobs in the printing industry?

**Ryan:** In the printing industry.

**Fiksdal:** Like moving to a different company?

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** And then they'd have to start over again?

**Ryan:** Yeah, because it was all non-union. They usually took a loss when they first got a new job. I could see getting hired as a non-traditional woman worker when I was in my twenties and very strong,

but I could see it wasn't going to be something that I could do for a long time. Even though I might be strong enough, employers wouldn't think I was once I got to my forties and fifties. I could see that coming.

Also, I was distressed by the men that I was working with. They were boring and sexist.

[laughing]

**Fiksdal:** I can imagine.

**Ryan:** I worked with some interesting women, but I was always on another shift, or they would move away, so I applied at the Post Office. It was pretty darn interesting, and it was a job I could get that was a union job, it was secure at the time, had good benefits, and it had a wage that was close to what I was used to. As a self-supporting person, I really needed something that paid a lot. At the time, when I did all that work, my female friends that had bachelor's degrees were all earning less money than I did.

**Fiksdal:** It doesn't surprise me too much. I was there. I remember.

**Ryan:** I know. Now, the picture would be reversed. My female friends with bachelor's degrees would be earning more, but at that time, no, I was earning more than most women who had a bachelor's.

**Fiksdal:** It also gave you benefits. Right? Retirement, health insurance.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** It was a much better job.

**Ryan:** Yeah. I worked in the Post Office. I got really involved with the Postal Workers Union. Eventually, I was the union steward, I was a convention delegate to national conventions, I was the editor of the monthly newspaper. Postal newspapers used to circulate all around the country. A local like Seattle would send their paper out to hundreds of other locals, so people got to know each other's views.

**Fiksdal:** That's terrific. Real networking.

**Ryan:** Yeah. I got involved in a big project around privatization and an organizing project proposing that the union respond to privatization in two ways: by organizing private sector postal workers into the union, people whose work had been contracted out and worked for low-wage private companies, and the other way was a really broad coalition that understood who was behind privatization. It wasn't just a matter of a few Republicans with bad ideas. It wasn't a matter of small business wanting in on the pie. It was really corporate driven with just a desire to make profits. It didn't really have very much to do with ideology. But at the time, the Democrats were leaning that way, too, with the Bill Clintons and what they called New Democrats. They were across the country promoting privatization as well.

**Fiksdal:** Let me just interject here. Were you still in the Socialist Workers Party?

**Ryan:** I'd quit that. I think I quit it in '85. I started to work in the Post Office in January 1984 at the beginning of the year, and I think I quit that in '85. It was because it had grown so sectarian and self-referential and insular. It was not speaking to anybody really anymore.

It's a really interesting perspective on—I'm very sympathetic with the Seattle City Council with Kshama Sawant. They did a really good job heading up the "Fight for \$15" and have put forth some really good ideas. But her rhetoric is so sectarian. It feels like it's designed to make the speaker and her inner group feel like great revolutionaries.

I remember when she was the graduation speaker at Evergreen. I was appalled because she has a tin ear—it was like she was speaking to a group of Marxist scholars or something. It was terrible.

**Fiksdal:** I have a friend who's a communist. It's the same thing. In our conversations, I don't get to talk about personal things too long and then—Boom! It's the party line. It's off putting.

**Ryan:** Who was that?

**Fiksdal:** It was a friend who I've known since high school. Anyway, it's the same problem of this rhetoric that has much more meaning for him and his colleagues than it does for me, so it doesn't make me want to join. [laughing]

**Ryan:** Right. But that was one of the great things about studying history is you can find amazing examples of socialist parties in the United States that were very popular and very progressive in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. All over the country, they were winning elections in the 'teens. I think probably all the divisions around the Russian Revolution and then the Red Scare pretty much put an end to that. But they are very popular platforms, and they were the source of many of the best ideas of the Progressive Era, like public utilities and all sorts of things.

There are really good examples of people promoting good ideas, meeting people where they're at, listening to them. [laughing] It's not impossible.

**Fiksdal:** Somehow, that party is stuck. Talk a little more about this Postal job, because I've often heard you refer to it, but it lasted 10 years or so?

**Ryan:** Twelve in all. I started in '84, and I think it was in '88 or '89—Back up. I'd known Stephanie Coontz through that organization, too, and was friends with her. I used to come down and visit her in Olympia and spend the night and hang out. We'd go mushroom hunting with Peta Henderson. [laughing] But I didn't understand there was anything really special about Evergreen.

We had a union conference in Seattle—a regional thing, probably had 50 or 60 people at it—and the Labor Center, Helen Lee, came to talk about the summer school for union women. That sounded really interesting, so I decided to go to it.

Once I'd been at that program and they talked about how this method of involving people in the solutions to their own problems, and putting the responsibility for figuring out the truth and what to do on students, or people in educational programs—not saying there was an expert who could answer all the questions for you, but you had to reflect on your own experience, build small-group connections with other people, and collectively try to figure out what to do—that was revolutionary to me because I'd never known that there was education that ever did that.

**Fiksdal:** Also, unions are pretty hierarchical. Right? I was in one for a very brief time, but I only went to a couple meetings because they just talked down to us and wouldn't listen, and especially not to a young woman. That was in the '70s.

**Ryan:** Our union local, the Seattle American Postal Workers, was a good experience. My first experience with it was having a grievance and a gay female steward represented us and we won our jobs back. We were about to get fired because they were trying to force us to memorize twice as much stuff as was legal under the contract. They just figured they could do it if they'd just go hard or go fast. We got a settlement that saved our jobs.

The American Postal Workers Union has a very active volunteer structure. Very little staff. It wouldn't hold together a minute if it were relying on paid staff, which a lot of unions, unfortunately, do. The way it was talked about in the '90s was that there's a service model and an organizing model. The service model says you just pay your dues. We professionals will take care of everything for you. But the organizing model says we're not going to survive unless the members get involved.

So, it was pretty good. They really solicited member involvement. I'd say the majority of the people didn't work dayshift. They either worked graveyard or swing shift, so they would alter the meeting times between noon one month, and then they'd be at 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. the next month so that no matter what shift you were in, you could get involved.

It formed out of consolidation after the big postal strike in 1970, but that was a time when there was a really strong union democracy movement. From the get-go, American Postal Workers had direct election of national officers, which a lot of unions didn't have, and almost no professional staff, so we never had professional staff in our meetings. It relied on a pretty good base of voluntary activism. That's the kind of person I was anyway so I didn't ever feel like it was hard to get heard.

What was hard was getting other people involved because they didn't necessarily see that they could make any improvements. A lot of times people got involved because they were mad at the way somebody else had done something or flubbed something up. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** Extrinsic motivation is great.

**Ryan:** Right. It's that way with politics, too.

**Fiksdal:** That's right. What happened when you went to this Evergreen Institute in the summer? Did you get more interested in Evergreen?

**Ryan:** Yeah, and I got real interested in the Labor Center. I learned the way the Labor Center did labor education because APW—the postal workers—was pretty democratic. But even there, steward training and training at the conferences, people didn't know how to teach. They would just throw a big—plunk!—stack of documents in front of you, and then drone on and on about them at the front of the classroom, so you had to learn on the fly by asking a lot of questions and being thrown in the deep end.

They were even that way when it came to subjects that you didn't really have to [use]. Like labor law. You didn't really have to use labor law very much. That was their idea of training, and that was most unions' idea of labor education.

**Fiksdal:** It was actually a very big thing. This really was revolutionary for you.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** Who was the director then? Was it Dan Leahy?

**Ryan:** It was Leahy. Helen Lee was on staff.

**Fiksdal:** I remember her.

**Ryan:** I thought, well, that's the only place I could go back to school. The Labor Center being there felt like it was a very good intellectual grounding. I thought about it deeply. I had become good friends with Helen, so it felt a little bit safer, but I took a deep breath and applied. There were no evening and weekend programs to speak of. If there had been Saturday classes, I probably would have gotten a bid for my job where I didn't have to work Saturdays and traveled.

But I took a deep breath. Got in. Rented my house out in Seattle—I was able to hang onto it because I could get enough rent to pay the mortgage—and moved to Oly and was in the fulltime day program. I started in fall of '90. It was in the program Environment, Regions and Governance with John Perkins and Ken Dolbeare. In the spring was something with Ken and Pat Matheny-White. That was my first year. I did an ILC on my postal research with Ken.

The second year I took John McCann's Labor Studies classes, I think for two quarters, and I took drawing.

**Fiksdal:** Was that parttime or fulltime?

**Ryan:** That was parttime. As far as I know, that was the first eight-hour evening and weekend program. It really proved that fulltime working adults, and a mix of fulltime day students, would go to a Saturday class, because it was always fully enrolled.

I learned from him about Paolo Freire and started learning about popular education. I just loved it, and I kept organizing postal workers, even though I wasn't working in the Post Office. I worked as a temp making a little more than half what I used to earn as a regular employee. [laughing] I worked as a letter carrier in the summer and did collections in the winter, parttime.

**Fiksdal:** You had a job.

**Ryan:** I had to. It was crazy. I don't know how people borrow so much these days, because I didn't want to work so much as I was working. But they wouldn't lend to me. I'd been a high-wage worker even though my mortgage cost half my monthly take home, just the mortgage alone, so I wasn't saving money or anything like that. But because I was a single female that made almost \$30,000 a year, I didn't qualify for even federal subsidized loans.

**Fiksdal:** That's too bad.

**Ryan:** I got a loan from the credit union. I think it was eight percent or nine percent.

**Fiksdal:** They were high. We bought a house in those years, and it was really expensive. Nine percent. Wow.

**Ryan:** I know. But I loved it. I wasn't done with learning. I could have gone right to work. I got some offers from some unions to go to work.

**Fiksdal:** You graduated after studying with John McCann?

**Ryan:** At Evergreen, yeah. I got some offers even before I graduated, so I could have had a good job as an organizer or rep or something. I even got an invitation from the Director of Research and Education from the National Postal Workers Union. I thought she hated me because I was organizing against her, I was arguing with her at this conference. But we were having lunch and discussing something, in a friendly way. I was definitely, not an oppositionist, but somebody who didn't rest easily with the ways that they were doing things. She said to me at lunch, "I like your spirit. Come and work for me."

[laughter]

**Fiksdal:** You could think on your feet.

**Ryan:** Yeah, I could have done her Research and Education department some real good. [laughter] She needed a staff like me.

By that time, I had committed to going to grad school at Rutgers. I talked to various people about graduate programs in labor studies and settled on Rutgers. I got in, and I was saying, "I can only go if I get some assistantship or something like that," because I couldn't afford to—even though they had low out-of-state tuition, I couldn't move all the way across the country. Blah blah blah.



They came back with an offer of a half assistantship. I thought, well, okay. I can make that work. They called me back during the summer before I was about to leave and said, “We lost all our assistantships, but we have a scholarship that was a union-sponsored scholarship we can offer you.” It covered half—I don’t know if it was a half a semester’s tuition or half of a year’s tuition. Because I had my house rented out again and I had all my plans to move, I just went for it.

It was a good program, although I remember having this experience about teaching that was so opposite my Evergreen experience. I had become really enamored of the way that a lot of faculty involved students in education, the idea that you could do ILCs, that you could propose classes, that you could talk about what you wanted to learn and learn more about, and figure out a way to do that within the structure, at least if you were creative and outgoing.

We had a graduate student organization, a social meet-up thing to talk about the program. After all, we were in a labor studies program. We should be organizing them. [laughter] A bunch of us had talked about some topics we’d like to see for the upcoming semesters for the classes. We went and spoke to the director—two of us—I thought very nicely and politely, and she burst into tears because she saw it as a critique of the program that the students were unhappy. We tried to say, “No, no, no. I would have thought you’d be happy.”

**Fiksdal:** You probably didn’t realize all that she had done to create the program that was or something. Maybe she had put her whole heart in it. Hard to know.

**Ryan:** Yeah. Anyway, she was eventually nice to me. But I moved out there, and I had this scholarship, but I had no job, and my savings were not impressive at all. I had to borrow some money to even make the journey across the country and pay for the mover to ship my stuff.

When I got there, having no assistantship and no job, there was an ad in the student paper for United Parcel Service. They were giving you \$2,000—maybe it was a \$3,000—stipend if you started before the semester and you stayed all semester and then you turned in your grades at the end. I think it was a \$3,000 supplement.

**Fiksdal:** Wow!

**Ryan:** They were only paying \$8.00 an hour, but I figured working—

**Fiksdal:** Did you work parttime?

**Ryan:** Yeah, from 11:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. in the sorting hub in Edison, New Jersey.

**Fiksdal:** You quit printing because it was a heavy-lifting job. Then there you are again.

**Ryan:** Yeah, on stupid graveyard shifts and all that. I had to get a graveyard shift, so I went in there and a lot of people were working—they did pay for health care—just for the benefits.

I worked about three weeks. It was really interesting because I was studying the shipping, mail and logistics centers industry anyway. That was my area of research, so it was really interesting to see it from the inside. I just thought, they have the worse union contract. Oh, my gawd.

It was funny, because my reflection was it was like getting paid to get beat up. The packages are falling all over you and you're struggling like Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times* to keep up. When you get behind, they had a floater that would come and help you stack your truck up, and they'd come back around when you got behind again. I finally learned that it was engineered so that you'd get behind. It was engineered so nobody could keep up, but you believed that other people could, and what's wrong with you? So, you knock yourself out trying to keep up, and they know good and well that you can't. They've built in this extra person that keeps coming around to help you catch up. It was really interesting. My other one-liner about it was when I went in to quit, there was a line. [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** Oh, that's funny!

**Ryan:** I'll bet there's a lot of people in that situation, because they wouldn't give you your final paycheck until you turned in some exit paperwork and stuff, so you had to wait in line to quit. It was a longer line than getting hired.

**Fiksdal:** That's crazy. But then what did you do? No job.

**Ryan:** The reason I quit was because I'd been in my classes and around the department during the day, I got known by the faculty. Even though they'd lost all their assistantships, they still had some wage budget to pay people a discrete sum for research assistants or what they called grading.

All of a sudden, I went from having just the UPS job to having three other jobs—a 10-hour, a 15 and a five or something—for three faculty members—for the union, the AAUP—the professors' union—and for two of the faculty members. But that was great because that was my best experience, doing research for people.

**Fiksdal:** A lot more interesting, and it fit in with what you were doing. I'm glad.

**Ryan:** I guess what happened was that the faculty let the students come and see how they were for a while before they started figuring out who to hire because you're not going to hire just anybody.

**Fiksdal:** When you're brand new. Right.

**Ryan:** Yeah, when you hadn't been around.

**Fiksdal:** How long was your program? Was it a two-year program?

**Ryan:** Two year, yeah. I did a summer internship with the Communications Workers doing research on privatization for them. At the end of that, I was flying back to help the Labor Center for the summer school for union women and John McCann had quit teaching Labor Studies. He was teaching that class

with Susan Preciso, but nobody was teaching Labor Studies. The Labor Center wanted to keep it in the curriculum, and it was getting a good response, so they asked if I would put in a proposal for at least some four-credit courses. I did, and they accepted it. I was scheduled to teach four-credit courses in the fall.

**Fiksdal:** When you were supposed to return to grad school.

**Ryan:** Right. [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** Sarah, speaking of non-traditional students . . .

**Ryan:** I knew that there was more than one way to skin a cat. The graduate program had a thesis option, but the thesis was like nine semester hours, so that was a lot of credit. I decided to do this thesis option—which was really a good decision, it was a great decision—and then see if I could get credits for equivalent courses taken out here. They let me substitute a UW finance class for the finance class that they had there, and they let me do an equivalent of an ILC on labor history curriculum development. So, I managed to finish the credits for my graduate degree.

**Fiksdal:** The director really loosened up, I see.

**Ryan:** Yeah, they really did.

**Fiksdal:** Either that or they really wanted to retain you and graduate you, because their numbers mattered.

**Ryan:** I think they really did. And the faculty were all really, really good about it, although I can't say that I didn't get good help with the thesis. I got some good questions. They had a defense. I got some helpful responses to my drafts from them, but I actually got better responses to my drafts from a friend of mine that was a historian. I would send him drafts and he'd comment.

**Fiksdal:** It's odd not to have a mentor, one person who's working with you.

**Ryan:** Right. In theory, I did, but they didn't really. It would be a lot easier now, but with these low-residency programs that are all over the place, I bet it's really not the case that most graduate students really have mentors.

**Fiksdal:** Another question. Did you have to type your thesis and send it in, or did you have a computer by then?

**Ryan:** I had a computer by then, but you couldn't e-mail it. My computer was basically a typewriter, and I had e-mail, but the size of a document you could send over e-mail . . . so I was FEDEXing.

**Fiksdal:** You didn't even UPS it?

**Ryan:** No.

**Fiksdal:** No loyalty at all.

**Ryan:** Or Express Mail. I was Express-Mailing—I remember, too, I wrote a thing for Stephanie Coontz for her reader on American families, and I remember sending the drafts back and forth from Seattle to Olympia by Express Mail.

**Fiksdal:** People now—kids—just don't get it. How did you communicate? How did you keep your friends? When you traveled, did they have a way to reach you—they just can't understand it.

**Ryan:** And long-distance calls were expensive in that period.

**Fiksdal:** They were. It was really expensive for a long time. So, you stayed in Olympia, and you started teaching?

**Ryan:** I moved back to Seattle.

**Fiksdal:** You had your house.

**Ryan:** Yeah. I moved back into my house when I got the job at Evergreen, and I got my old Post Office job back. I drove down on Saturdays and taught my class on Saturdays. Sometimes I would drive down for a meeting or something in the afternoon. But when I first came back, it was terrible because I came back making \$5.00 less an hour than I had when I left. I had a good record from before, it wasn't so hard to get rehired, and I knew what I was doing as a window clerk. They were saying, "Can you work any and all shifts?" Of course, they expect everybody to say, "Yes." I wrote on the application, "No, I cannot work Saturdays between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m." Because I figured that was my commuting window. Anything else, I'll do.

My manager, because I was low seniority in the station—I was working at Wallingford station—was trying to force me to work Saturdays, and was understandably upset because others had seniority and they had to work the Saturdays and I didn't. But I just said, "Look, I put it on the application, and you hired me with that, that I wouldn't work Saturdays and I'm not going to work Saturdays."

I had a shift that started at 3:00 in the morning and I said, "You can schedule me for Saturday, and I'll come in at 3:00, but at 8:00 a.m., I'm getting in my car and I'm driving to Olympia. I am not leaving 25 students sitting in a classroom with no faculty member." [laughing] I guess they backed down, and then after that, I got out of the station, and I got a more parttime job at night sorting mail in the big plant.

I was involved in the union again, and I'd stayed in touch and shared my research and all that and been involved in conventions and meetings all while I was in graduate school. I got the job back and worked it for another, I guess, six years. I had three jobs in a seven-day week for six years. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** That's horrible. The year you first got hired, could you remind me of that?

**Ryan:** It was fall of '93.

**Fiksdal:** We formed the new Parttime Studies program in '96.

**Ryan:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** In '96, were you teaching an eight-quarter-hour program?

**Ryan:** Let's see . . . in fall of '96, I was. In fall of '96, I was.

**Fiksdal:** I remembered you as part of that core group, and I just wanted to verify.

**Ryan:** Right. I had three years of four credit classes—fall, winter, spring—and then fall of '96 . . . I think I taught alone. I guess I didn't have a teaching partner until with Joli [Sandoz?] in '98-'99.

**Fiksdal:** I noticed that. I saw our list, but now I don't have it in front of me. You kept this other job, but at least it was parttime.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** Wow. Also, I think that when you were first teaching that eight-quarter-hour program in '96, you still didn't have that thesis done.

**Ryan:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** That was hanging over your head. That must have been pretty tough.

**Ryan:** It was. In order to finish it, I had to—it also turned out to be important to my work. It's still up there on a website from a group called Save the Post Office. It's published on the Internet. Anybody can find it. I got a call from a think tank for the Economic Policy Institute last year wanting to talk about privatization, because they were preparing a policy piece for the Biden administration, and the woman said my thesis was the best thing she'd ever read and made things make sense. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** Yay!!!

**Ryan:** Then I got an interview with somebody—I don't know if it was *ProPublica*—at one of the alternative publications as well. My thesis was serialized in the union newspaper. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** That is really smart. Small snippets are always better.

**Ryan:** It could be useful.

**Fiksdal:** Exactly.

**Ryan:** I tried to write it in readable language, and I tried to make it not this thing that only had an internal academic audience. That was really important to me. Maybe not to other people, but to me, it was very important.

I finally finished it. By the time I got everything done, it was '98, so my graduation from Rutgers was January of '99. Suffice to say, I didn't go back there for graduation. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** It was too far, too expensive. That enabled you to apply for the regular halftime position, which is so important because you were one of our stars by then.

Let's talk a little bit about Parttime Studies. At the time, we had a little saying, "Parttime studies for fulltime lives." You knew all about that from your own life experience. You were working with non-traditional students who were older. I think at the very beginning, it was mostly older students. Right? Is that how you remember it?

**Ryan:** I would say it was maybe two-thirds older, one-third younger Greeners. But the other thing about it was the class. I remember there was this woman, [Johnna Carroll? 00:53:15]. Her mother was one of the first ferry engineers, and later a ferry captain, on the Washington State Ferries System who obviously worked a non-traditional job in very many ways. Anyway, [Johnna?] had grown up with this feminist striving mother in a non-traditional occupation. She was maybe 21.

I had this discussion with her in our first class. I had it scheduled from 10:00 to 2:00, a four-hour class, but I said, "Are these hours okay with everybody? Does anybody work graveyard and it's too early in the morning?" People decided to stick with the 10:00 to 2:00, but I was willing to make it 11:00 to 3:00 or 9:00 to whatever if that was better.

[Johnna] wrote one time in her evaluation that "I was so impressed that she asked that question. I'd never had a faculty member before that acknowledged that there was shiftwork."

**Fiksdal:** I certainly wouldn't have thought about it. I'd worked shiftwork. I did. I was a waitress for a little over a year and it was horrible, but a lot of time had passed, so I don't think I would have thought of it either.

**Ryan:** I would say mostly older students. In fact, I guess he was about the oldest person in the class for a while, even in that class—a guy named Ken [Lockington? 00:55:23] —and he was a fire chief. He'd been a firefighter all his life. I just remembered him so well. I don't know why. Maybe he was in two quarters of the four-credit class.

I was in my dean office minding my own business and this guy walks in. He just sits there. I said, "Oh, Ken." This was close to 20 years later, and I remembered him, and he was amazed. But he was a school bus driver in retirement, and he was on campus bringing a group of kids to the Upward Bound or something like that.

**Fiksdal:** That is really a great story, that he took the time to come by and say hello. That's so great.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** We should just mention here that 20 years later, you were Dean of Evening and Weekend Studies.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** Let's go back in time again. I did a lot of recruiting with older students. I remember meeting them in the library. I don't think I went to State offices, but we sure put a lot of brochures out. I remember talking about what liberal arts was, and saying, "It doesn't mean you're liberal as opposed to conservative." People really liked that. They liked to get down to the business. "What is it, then?" So, I could talk about it. It really attracted a lot of people.

In those early years of that program, teaching a four-credit class is really different than teaching an eight-quarter-hour program, and then team teaching. I'm just wondering how you learned to teach. You were a student at Evergreen, so you understood certain principles, and you were an older student, so you had the experience of a different kind of undergraduate education. But without team teaching right away, I'm wondering how that worked out for you.

**Ryan:** I think I really modeled myself on the best experiences that I had as a student. Because when I went to the Rutgers graduate program, it wasn't with the ambition of teaching. I was probably going to just work for a union. I might have done labor ed. I liked to. So, the best experiences were my undergraduate at Evergreen—many aspects of that—and then some of the better aspects of my graduate class.

I was starting to study popular education, and the history of workers' education, and the kinds of things that people did, so I had also some really good experiences with the Labor Center. To me, I guess, of the Five Foci, I think personal engagement has always been a key thing, so I always tried to help students figure out and angle where they were personally invested and had some genuine curiosity. That would drive their learning.

When I was at Rutgers, I was a research helper for Sue Cobble. She's written on history, mainly of women's unionism. But she was teaching a class that was called Women in Work, and it was a graduate/undergraduate class. She had 35 maybe undergrads and maybe 10 graduate students in it. She worked with the graduate students, and then she had me grade all the assignments, and eventually, do the grades. I hated having to do grades after doing narrative evaluations.

She also let me design the major assignment for the undergrads. I designed an assignment where they did a three-generation history of women's work in their own family, or another family they were close to, so that they could compare their family's experience to the history that we were studying. They could also do oral histories, go back and interview. They pretty much all got fascinated with their project and produced a really interesting body of work.

**Fiksdal:** Excuse me but Zoom just skipped.

**Ryan:** Almost all of them got really involved in their projects. There were very few perfunctory responses. It was a quite meaningful piece. Then I took all 35 stories, and I did a lecture where I mapped them using time periods and kinds of occupations that women workers were likely to be in. It was really interesting.

They could choose any three generations, so if they had a grown daughter who was working, they could do that. If it was too sad, or they were alienated from their family or something like that, they could choose any family they were close to and find three generations.

**Fiksdal:** What was it like for you to become a faculty member at the same college where you were a student? Was that odd?

**Ryan:** It didn't feel too weird, mainly because I was older. When I was a student, I remember Keith [Dubonica? 01:02:23] and I were the two oldest people in our program. We were in the fulltime day program. And I'd done labor education classes with the Labor Center and with my union where I was the main person, so I felt I knew what I was doing. I think probably I asked Leahy to look over my draft syllabus to see what he thought of it. I just tried to model on the best of what I'd experienced.

When you start when you're a little bit older, people conflate credit for experience that you don't have. [laughing] When you walk into the room with already gray hair or a few wrinkles, they think that you have experience.

**Fiksdal:** That's a good point. They don't know you're a novice or feeling like a novice. I'm wondering how long you kept commuting from Seattle.

**Ryan:** I finally moved out of my house and moved down at the beginning of '99 and in '98.

**Fiksdal:** That's a drain on your time to have to travel, on top of everything else.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** And you needed to be working still, because it was still just halftime pay.

**Ryan:** Yeah, it was halftime, so what did I do? Then I bought a house down here, because the differences in the prices was pretty extreme. Then Mike [last name?] moved in with me in '99. Between both of our incomes, we were okay. The mortgage on that house, I put so much down on it, I only owed \$400 a month on the house. It was like student rent. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** Finally!

**Ryan:** But I often taught a course on top of a halftime program, if I could.

**Fiksdal:** That helped a lot, I'm sure.



**Ryan:** But that was crazy. I had several quarters—because the enrollment was always vigorous—I remember one quarter I must have had 27 halftime, and 26 quarter time, and then maybe two contracts on top of that. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** You never should have taken the contracts.

**Ryan:** I had 55 evaluations.

**Fiksdal:** Wait a minute. They were different? You didn't just have the students from your program do the course?

**Ryan:** No, a completely separate course.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, that's too much.

**Ryan:** Some of the students took both, but not very many.

**Fiksdal:** No, that's crazy. I've done that, and that's horrible.

**Ryan:** It certainly made evaluation week very hard.

**Fiksdal:** It's way too much work. Just keeping track of everybody. That's not good.

**Ryan:** But I really liked the faculty community in the Parttime Studies, so as much as I could, even when I was commuting, I tried to come down at least a couple times a month for meetings and stuff in the afternoon. I was proud of the program. I thought we had a really broad and engaging curriculum.

**Fiksdal:** That's great. I'm going to ask you about the planning in a minute, but I want to ask how well integrated did you feel? Did you feel like an Evergreen faculty member? Did you feel a part of the Evergreen community?

**Ryan:** I guess I didn't really know what I was missing if I was missing something. But for the most part, I did, but so much stuff happens during the day, and if you have a job elsewhere, it's pretty hard. But once I'd moved to Olympia, I was more involved in governance than most fulltime faculty members.

I also really appreciated, in terms of learning to teach, the Summer Institutes and having access to those was really important.

**Fiksdal:** Everybody I've talked to in these interviews has said that.

**Ryan:** They were really good. They were good, and they were in person. I think eventually they devolved into an alienated paid planning time that maybe you'd engage with your partner, but you wouldn't do drafts of your program and have other people review it.

**Fiksdal:** That's when the Washington Center took over the planning, I think.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** It wasn't as easy to be excited about it. Right?

**Ryan:** No. It was even worse with the Six Red Marbles. Oh, my gawd. There was a company that was hired to train us to do online stuff, and they did a Summer Institute. It was a company called Six Red Marbles, which is for-profit. It mainly does K-12 stuff.

But they didn't . . . let's say there was nothing about building a learning community. There was nothing about learning as a social and collective experience. It was all learning was an individual experience reacting with content on a machine. [laughing] That was really, really, really disappointing to see the Washington Center promoting and paying for this.

They even had a little thing we were supposed to experience, which was gamifying your curriculum to improve student involvement. The example of doing it that they gave us was a speed multiple choice quiz that you would "win" by answering as many questions as possible in a short amount of time.

**Fiksdal:** It sounds ridiculous.

**Ryan:** I refused to participate.

**Fiksdal:** Of course. I would have walked out.

**Ryan:** You couldn't. You were at home on Zoom. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** You could stop your video. [laughter] Put the mute on.

**Ryan:** Put the video on pause and go get a cup of coffee.

**Fiksdal:** That's right.

**Ryan:** If not a beer.

**Fiksdal:** That's really terrible.

**Ryan:** The other things that we had stopped doing, where you really did learn a lot, was the faculty retreat when they actually were retreats, not just a long meeting.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. I remember those days and how retreats changed. Well, they always changed. They were never perfect. They were always criticized, but there were better retreats in the earlier days than later, that's for sure.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** Now I want to move to team teaching, because that was a lot more fun. When you were team teaching, I'm not sure how this was for you. Maybe in the beginning, you were doing certain kinds of programs, or did it shift over time? Do you have a trajectory that you can see? How did that work for you?

**Ryan:** I think it was in the planning meetings in the Parttime Studies that Joli and I talked about teaching together. It was really interesting because I think—I don't know if it was our enrollment—we had a

good program. We worked out a lot of good things, and we did build on each other's strengths, and learn from each other. I think that we had a really good experience with a pretty engaged learning community.

We changed the title. We kept remodeling a whole lot in the process. Our enrollment was decent, at least by today's standards. It was 35 to 40-ish. It wasn't 50, but we had a good experience, we both learned a lot, and we had a very high-involvement class. It was really good. It was a Saturday class. We were able to do fieldtrips. We did a labor conference. As observers, we went to the big teachers' rally that the Washington Education Association did.

We had a student who, for his project, wrote a play about labor. It was a little comic. It was a short farce, but it was nicely plotted and well-acted. They put it on in the lecture hall and it had a really good turnout, a good audience. They performed it at the Labor Day celebration for Olympia later on.

But we had really interesting projects. We had students that I'm still in touch with. I think you came to that one (as my dean) because I seem to remember an evaluation. We did a strategy game and I think you were observing then. The students were so creative, and they knew their stuff. When they were acting in their roles, they had really learned what might happen. And they'd learned that the rhetoric, or the arguments, that their side might use, and strategies [for] their side. It was really interesting.

**Fiksdal:** I think Joli was always interested in those kinds of games. That's good to hear. So, that was your first teaching partner?

**Ryan:** Yeah. Then, because we had [what] felt like heavy pressure to get your six teaching partners in—

**Fiksdal:** Oh, I don't remember this. You had to have six?

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** In what period of time?

**Ryan:** I guess in three years.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, yeah, because you had a three-year contract.

**Ryan:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** I designed it like the early days of Evergreen.

**Ryan:** Right. The problem is that you couldn't have six teaching partners in three years unless you taught one-quarter programs, because if you did year-long, you'd only have three partners. Our enrollment was never to the point where we had 75 students in a program.

**Fiksdal:** Keeping students for three quarters was already really hard.

**Ryan:** Yeah. I found them really intellectually engaging, good experiences, but I did three one-quarters the first year.

**Fiksdal:** Uh-oh.

**Ryan:** Doug Schuler, working with computers, where he made me do the Web site. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** Really?

**Ryan:** It was fun working with him, but he's like a fun guy that won't do the dishes. I had to go to Seattle with him to meet with him and do planning because he was averse to coming down for an extra day or two.

But it was really an interesting program because one of the critical questions we were looking at was, how has computerization remodeled the world of work on a global basis? It was when the WTO was meeting in Seattle, so there were teach-ins about the WTO at Evergreen, and then there were students doing digital media for their projects.

The whole program went to a couple of teach-in sessions in Olympia about the WTO, and then I think there were about seven students in a project group, all early digital video pioneers, who took their cameras out and interviewed people that were at the demonstrations in Seattle about why they were there and what the issues were and all that. They produced a fascinating piece. It was really neat. That was a really good one.

Then it was fall/winter/spring. I think it was with Nancy Parkes on environment, and then with Ann Storey on the arts and crafts movement. No, I guess it was Theresa Aragon. Anyway, I had a really wide variety of topics, but they all, to me, fit into the house of labor studies, because it was looking critically at work through historical, cultural, organizational, sociological perspectives. It was a really interesting experience, although it was a lot of work trying to research and come up with good programs.

**Fiksdal:** So many different themes. What's interesting, though, it strikes me that labor studies is an umbrella discipline. Linguistics is, too. There are so many different aspects that you can tie in, but you don't know them all right away. You have to listen to your colleague's ideas. Talk to me about some of your favorite programs, maybe some that you repeated.

**Ryan:** I definitely came to have signature programs, and to repeat them not to make it easier, but because of their success, and because I kept wanting to make them better, because they were worth making better. They were good partnerships, and the students reviewed them all very positively, and they had a big impact on their lives.

That was Justice at Work and The Age of Irony with Susan. I think I did The Age of Irony four times, but Susan did it five because she did it once with John Baldrige after she and I had done it three times. It was a 20<sup>th</sup> Century cultural and social history.

**Fiksdal:** Justice at Work. Who did you teach that with?

**Ryan:** Arlene Sandifer. I did an iteration, a little scratch version of it, at first with Theresa Aragon. That was okay, but she really wanted to do intensive weekends, so basically, we really only had three weekends.

**Fiksdal:** That's true. That was always her emphasis.

**Ryan:** Yeah. I didn't feel that I got to know the students, I didn't think the quality of the work was that good. It wasn't the same at all. Arlene and I did it—maybe we did it as two-quarter programs mostly, but we did three quarters one time, and the third quarter was about immigration. But it was Labor History, Civil Rights History, and Law. It was always so relevant.

We always kept it updated with what was going on. The same with The Age of Irony. We always refined our workshops. We talked about our frustrations about things that didn't work so well, things that did work well, and how to extend the approaches that had been successful.

**Fiksdal:** I agree. Working hard on a program, it's like writing a thesis, and I think you're always learning. And as you say, especially because you need to adapt it, either because you didn't feel completely satisfied last time, or because something really big is happening in the world. There's something about teaching at Evergreen that keeps the curriculum highly relevant. I always appreciated that about Parttime Studies.

You were all really good program planners. You were forced to be because you were such a small group, especially at the very beginning, and you had to teach together. There was no one else. You had to expand your own knowledge because of the people you were working with, whether you were interested in it or not. I hate to say that, but I had a much wider pool of disciplines to choose from than you did when I was teaching, so I always really admired the creativeness of Evening and Weekend Studies faculty.

**Ryan:** It was so funny, because The Age of Irony, you'd get to know those students so well by the end. It always felt like the next iteration of students just can't live up to our last group. And then they would. [laughing] You'd get to know them so well. I would learn so much from their research, their projects, and the experience that they brought. It was always really enjoyable doing those as signature programs. We never saw anything that anyone else was doing that was anything like that.

Students I had that were in Justice at Work, I had quite a few students that ended up going to law school out of Justice at Work. I had some students who went to a grad program in labor studies, and they said Justice at Work was a lot more challenging than their graduate classes. It was pretty deep. We had them reading critical legal studies and critical race theory. Books that were really written for law students.

**Fiksdal:** I know. I taught with Jose Gomez one year—it was a year-long program—and we were studying actual cases.

**Ryan:** Yeah, we did, too.

**Fiksdal:** It was hard work. Then I needed to interject linguistics, so we were reading all this stuff about language and power in law. The students did a mock Supreme Court at the end, in the spring, so I had them analyzing the arguments, analyzing by taking videos of this and doing conversation analysis, so it was amazing. That was a lot of students, and we didn't have that many that wanted to go on to law school. By the end, I think they knew the limitations of law. They understood a lot better than some students can. I know everyone gets all fired up, but law is limited. There's a certain amount that you can do and studying those Supreme Court pieces—constitutional law is what we did—it can be heartrending to look at past cases, or even now.

**Ryan:** You think that's depressing. Look at labor law. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Ryan:** It's a system that's stacked against the original purposes of the laws that are written, but for some reason—I remember quite a few years later, I had this student, Nora Danielson. Eventually, she went to a graduate program in migration studies somewhere, and she'd work in immigrant and refugee organizations and advocacy.

She got a PhD, and then she wrote to me, I would say, when I was dean, asking for a law school reference from me. "You're the one who has a PhD in migration studies. I'm just a person who doesn't even have expertise in law. I'm literate. I can read cases and tell what they mean, and I have some background and I understand the critical legal studies perspective and its critique and all that. I have some grasp of the history of labor and civil rights and immigration law."

Anyway, I wrote her the recommendation. She said, "No, no. You really know my potential for studying."

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, because to get recommendations for PhD studies, you can get one or two people maybe. They're busy. I think she just valued that class so much.

**Ryan:** She did. I wrote the recommendation. She got into Georgetown, probably the hardest law school to get into in the country.

**Fiksdal:** That's so great. That makes you feel good.

**Ryan:** Yeah, it does.

**Fiksdal:** I'm looking at the questions. You talked a little bit about a couple of students that were important to you. You talked about doing governance, but let's find out a little bit more about what you liked about it and what you did.

**Ryan:** When Barbara Smith was Provost—for some of my years, I was working parttime at the Labor Center, too, while I was also teaching—Barbara would work with the Public Service Centers. She saw them as having a teaching mission in an applied way, so it was really interesting working with her on Public Service Center issues and how those fit into the college in general.

I was on the Agenda Committee and agreed to be the Council Faculty Rep's rep for a while, so I really learned a lot about politics and higher ed and the Legislature and all that. While I was doing that, the unions organized to have an enabling legislation introduced to permit faculty to organize unions. I had a lot of internal debates within CFR, because it wasn't clear if CFR was going to support, or the other institutions were going to support, that legislation. Not the institutions but the faculty. The institutions didn't want it.

But also, some really interesting other things came up around pensions, around supplementation. Helen Sommers eventually succeeded in getting rid of supplementation, but she introduced a bill to get rid of it much earlier.

**Fiksdal:** What is supplementation?

**Ryan:** This is a long—did we talk about this in the retired faculty retreat? Faculty were put into TIAA-CREF in the early '70s. Before that, they'd been in the State pension plan, in PERS, PERS [Plan] 1. You know about State pensions, right? Wasn't your husband in the State?

**Fiksdal:** Yes, my husband is in, yeah.

**Ryan:** And he's in PERS 1, I'm sure.

**Fiksdal:** He's in PERS 1, luckily. Even though we left for a while, but we got back in. We paid to get back in.

**Ryan:** And you could get back in because there was this Supreme Court decision in Washington that the pension system that you signed up for when you were first hired is a guarantee, and they can't alter that for the worse. When they set up PERS 2, you could opt into PERS 2 instead, but they couldn't make you. Anyone who got in PERS 1 was eligible for PERS 1 for life.

When faculty were put from PERS into TIAA CREF, it was a very bad time of the stock market, and it wasn't clear at all that they would have the equivalent benefits. What they came up with was that the high two-year average that PERS 1 uses for setting your pension, they came up with a thing that if you couldn't buy an annuity when you retired as faculty that was equivalent to 50 percent of your high two-year average, then they would supplement you what you could get up to that amount.

Let's say my high two-year average was \$70,000. If I couldn't get \$35,000 a year from my annuity, then they would supplement me up to the \$35,000.

**Fiksdal:** I remember in the '80s some retired faculty received extra money from the college because the stock market was really down. Okay, so it's called supplementation.

**Ryan:** Yeah, it was a safety net for faculty.

**Fiksdal:** Interesting.

**Ryan:** And it made their pension equivalent to State worker pensions from the same period. Helen—my husband calls her the “pension Nazi”—was always trying to reduce some State employee pensions, even though she is collecting three of them. She introduced a bill. At the time, it was a stock market boom—it was the late '90s—and some faculty, because their TIAA CREF was heavily into the stock market, and it was booming, were sometimes retiring with more income than they'd ever made teaching from their annuities or their investments. If that happened, there was stuff in the legislation where they could cap the contribution rate so they would reduce you from 10 percent to eight percent or something if it looked like people were making too much.

The late-career, highly invested faculty did not want the contribution rates capped.

**Fiksdal:** Well, no. Our pay was always so low. I started in the '70s. It was horrible.

**Ryan:** She said, “Okay, we won't cap the contributions, but you have to give up supplementation.” It was asking the high-wage people to give up something for the low-wage people, or the people who might be vulnerable and for the new hires. I said, “That sounds a lot like what went on in the corporate sector over the last several years.”

**Fiksdal:** That's what we did, isn't it? We did that, but I didn't know the origins of it. I just thought, yeah, we have to attract younger faculty. I'm willing to do this. It went up for a faculty vote.

**Ryan:** We took a position of opposing the bill and not scrapping supplementation. I was a minority of one out of eight reps. But at one of our last meetings, I don't know, maybe it was '98 or something, there was a guy, Doug . . . I forget what his last name was. He was a pension expert that taught at Eastern. That was his area of study. He was sitting in on the CFR meeting, and he later said that he agreed with me. I thought, oh, okay, I understand how to organize faculty. One thing they do believe in



is their own expertise. So, I kicked off the year with Evergreen hosting the first meeting and Doug giving a presentation on pensions and supplementation. [laughter] That convinced most of the rest of them to oppose the bill. I think it stalled it off for a few years, but in 2010, she finally got it passed, so anybody hired after 2010 didn't get supplementation. They just get what they get. It's all, are you a good gambler or a bad gambler? I'm not a gambler at all!

**Fiksdal:** Right. Most of us—me, I just put my money in and never looked at it again. That served me well, but it might not have.

**Ryan:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** It was scary. It was a gamble.

**Ryan:** Those are some governance things I did. I always was active in the planning unit, and very opinionated on the curriculum. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** But that was needed. You needed people, not just the deans, to be looking at the overall curriculum, and at the sequencing for the following year, because the students had to get an education. I remember Barbara met a student in one of the first quarters of our new Parttime Studies program, and the student said, "I can only come on Saturdays, and I'm not always interested in the programs that are taught on Saturdays." She got really mad at me, and she said, "You've got to pay attention!" And I thought, okay. I hadn't thought of that. This one student was probably not alone in coming on Saturdays, and we needed to have quite a number of programs so that there was choice. It was a constant learning curve, I remember.

**Ryan:** I enjoyed the experience of not just planning my own courses but looking at the overall student experience.

**Fiksdal:** You did. I depended on all of you. That's what you did. And it was a small enough group, and you were all so responsible, that it really worked well.

**Ryan:** It was hard to keep that community going.

**Fiksdal:** After I left?

**Ryan:** Russ Fox did a pretty good job of it as dean. I think it really started to fade a bit after Russ left, under Allen Olson, and it was really hard for me to recreate it. One thing I did. I just thought people shouldn't become regular faculty [after being adjunct faculty] if they haven't been active in the planning unit.

**Fiksdal:** That's a good point.

**Ryan:** They really shouldn't have.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Ryan:** It should have been really clear that that was part of the deal. Because being a member of the faculty is not the same as being an instructor.

**Fiksdal:** Maybe not everyone got trained or talked to in the same way. I was dean, then Russ Fox, then Allen Olson. Then, was it Theresa Aragon?

**Ryan:** No, she was dean of Extended Ed.

**Fiksdal:** Okay. Who came after Allen?

**Ryan:** Me.

**Fiksdal:** Okay, right.

**Ryan:** I think Allen might have had eight years, or seven? A long time. Me for four, and then unfortunately, a series of one-year deans. Because after me, George Freeman did one year, and hardly that. Then Lee Lyttle did one year and then Kathleen Eamon did two. Now there isn't anybody. I think you had the international studies desk instead of summer school. Right? Did you have summer school as well?

**Fiksdal:** I refused to take summer school. Starting a new program ate up my life.

**Ryan:** I know.

**Fiksdal:** I had to hire, I had to observe, I had to write all those evaluations, I had to listen to students. They came to my office. I had tons of meetings. I don't know if you knew this, but I was in this group where we met weekly with whoever was promoting our program.

**Ryan:** Yeah, and you had people promoting it. That was the thing. They'd taken them away. By the time I got in there, there was nobody in Advising.

**Fiksdal:** And we had advisors.

**Ryan:** Right. There was nobody in Admissions.

**Fiksdal:** You've got to have this academic subject. You've got to have that. And I didn't want to have this, and I didn't want to have that, so I had to say, "Well, yeah, one day maybe." It was just horrible. They think you can have seven courses in psychology. [laughing] No, you've got to have other things.

**Ryan:** I had to do Evening and Weekend and summer school.

**Fiksdal:** That's really hard.

**Ryan:** And it was funny because I'd never taught summer school, but I had a feeling that it was partly the same community. I think Evening and Weekend students probably had a higher rate of attending summer school than day students. I really wanted to make sure that there were accessible classes in the Evening and Weekends, so I had to move people around and say, "No, I won't accept it during the day." At least you had the power in summer school to say when faculty could teach.

**Fiksdal:** That maybe was a very good thing to do both, except for the workload.

**Ryan:** The workload was crazy, but now, they think that Steph is going to do, as a halftime, all the Evening and Weekend curriculum and summer school?

**Fiksdal:** What Steph?

**Ryan:** Stephen Beck is going by Steph.

**Fiksdal:** Sorry, I forgot. I heard that but I'd forgotten. Okay, so Steph is supposed to do all of that?

**Ryan:** Basically, as a volunteer, not as an administrator. What really disturbs me right now is that all the creativity and institutional energy is going into these certificates, and nobody is really looking out for a liberal arts education.

**Fiksdal:** What certificates?

**Ryan:** Oh, they've approved three certificates that are going to start in the fall. I think they're available for credit/non-credit. One is Transformational Leadership. DK.

**Fiksdal:** What do you mean, DK?

**Ryan:** [Diuse Kalegi? 01:43:34], the faculty member. He's an adjunct.

**Fiksdal:** I just don't know him.

**Ryan:** Business adjunct. But it's six classes with the same guy and maybe one with Cynthia Kennedy.

**Fiksdal:** Then you're done, and you have a certificate?

**Ryan:** The second one is Audio Engineering with Zena Vergara. It's audio recording and engineering.

**Fiksdal:** But she's a staff person.

**Ryan:** She's adjunct faculty.

**Fiksdal:** I see. Does she have a master's degree?

**Ryan:** Yeah, now she does. I observed her. She's a good teacher, and she's apparently a good audio engineer, and she's well connected to music people in Olympia. But the way they're selling the certificates is like "You're employable right away." Transformational Leadership. Seriously? And if you get an audio recording certificate in Olympia, you can go to work volunteering to make your friends' records, but you're not going to earn a living wage. Neither of them is liberal artsy.

**Fiksdal:** No, they're technical.

**Ryan:** The third one is something that Michael Paros is teaching. I guess it's a day program in human-animal interaction. Anthrozoology. I was thinking, if you get a certificate in anthrozoology, what are you going to do? You can go to work in an animal shelter or a veterinary office. For minimum wage.

**Fiksdal:** I think a lot of schools have these certificates, so maybe they just felt . . . I don't understand it. I think it's really too bad.

**Ryan:** All the intellectual energy is going into this. The Board somehow thinks this is going to save Evergreen. Now, even though they're talking about the new majority is working adult students, they're taking a very limited view of those students and what they want, and imagining that they all just want a few more bucks in their paycheck, and that's all they're interested in. That is so not—I tried to count the number of students I've probably worked with over the course of 24 years. It's close to 3,000. The vast majority of them were working adults. Many of them wouldn't have minded, but so many of them were really there because they really wanted to understand the world better. And a BA is good for their résumés.

**Fiksdal:** It helps you in some jobs.

**Ryan:** But very seldom was it a simple calculus of earning more money.

**Fiksdal:** What's really too bad is that they didn't seem to talk to you or the people who really knew parttime students and adult students.

**Ryan:** They didn't believe us. They think, well, you're just doing the same thing that's been failing. But it wasn't failing. The boom in '10-'11, and the boom leading up to '10-'11, was going to deflate anyway because of many factors. But I was really distressed because the year after George Freeman was dean, I got an outreach coordinator hired again in Admissions, Doug [Day?].

For veterans in Evening and Weekend Studies (EWS). That was supposed to be EWS and veterans' outreach. They did a really good job with veterans. They really did build up the veteran numbers quite a bit. They were great students. But Admissions were always borrowing the people to do high school-direct recruitment, and they never did approach State agencies and workplaces, let alone community college night programs. I remember going to Pierce College or Tacoma Community College and South Puget Sound Community college (SPSCC).

One time, I set up this event, and Admissions really helped. I forget which one, if it was Jeb or if it was Ron. [last names? 01:48:50] Ron was outreach coordinator under you, I think. Ron [Barhart?]? I see him sometimes at the valley.

**Fiksdal:** I can't quite capture him, his face even, right this minute.

**Ryan:** He looks like he's maybe half-Asian. He's a slight, darkhaired guy.

**Fiksdal:** That was after me. I do remember him.

**Ryan:** We went to the paralegal program and spoke at a paralegal class that had 40 people in it at SPSCC. Arlene and I went and promoted the Justice at Work program and Evening and Weekend Studies in general. The faculty member was great about having us come in. We used to get lots of people transferred from—

**Fiksdal:** You need to be there and talk to them about your program.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** When you were dean, what were some of the highlights, do you think?

**Ryan:** I think getting the outreach position restored and the publication. It was hearing from the outreach coordinator that people wanted to know more than one quarter in advance what was available. It was changing from the quarterly catalog to a yearlong catalog that was the mailer and getting resources to both publish and mail that. I think that really helped.

**Fiksdal:** I'm sure it did. I remember reading it.

**Ryan:** Then getting more regular faculty hired in Evening and Weekend Studies. Getting quite a few of the long-term adjuncts on continuing contracts. That was good.

**Fiksdal:** Was that when the union came in, too?

**Ryan:** No, the union vote was '06. I think the first contract started in '08. The first contract, I wasn't on the negotiating committee, but I was really involved in the union and really involved in fashioning priorities and such. That's when we got adjuncts' pay moved from 80 to 90 percent of full-time faculty pay.

**Fiksdal:** That was a big change.

**Ryan:** That was really important. I think the first contract had something about long-term adjunct conversion, but they were fulltime day jobs, and only fulltime day adjuncts got anything of them, so the second round, we had to figure out how to use it to make Evening and Weekend Studies more viable.

**Fiksdal:** When I was the dean, we had five regular faculty at first, and that stayed stable for quite a while, and it gradually grew. I can't remember how many there were by the time I left. Do you remember how many you had of regular halftime faculty?

**Ryan:** I think we had 14 and then we went to 18.

**Fiksdal:** That's a huge difference.

**Ryan:** Yeah. When we put out the yearlong catalog, I was always proud and happy with the design. It was a frustration that one student need we never succeeded in meeting was upper division science in the evening, and enough science in the evening.

**Fiksdal:** We had trouble hiring, if I recall.

**Ryan:** Awful trouble! When Peter Pessiki left us—

**Fiksdal:** He was unbelievable. I learned about him much later. Oh, my goodness. I had no idea.

**Ryan:** Another time, we can talk about him, but he was one of my first managerial experiences. But trying to hire to replace him, we went through several big failures, and the students were revolting, and

it was bad. We finally got a couple of really good people who were right out of graduate school and were acquainted with one of our younger regular faculty. That's a good pipeline for getting good chemistry teachers. We finally succeeded in that.

It was really interesting. I really tried to do a student advisory group. I would buy people lunches to have a long lunch on Saturday and just show up and talk about the program. But it was hard to sustain the same people coming to it again and again.

The job was overwhelming, with EWS and summer school and trying to take responsibility for the outreach and promotion.

**Fiksdal:** That's just crazy. You have to have help. I'm thinking that you had to be the only dean at Evergreen who started as a student. I'm going to have to really think about that now.

**Ryan:** No, Womeldorff did.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, yeah. That's right, Tom Womeldorff.

**Ryan:** Then if Steph Beck becomes a dean, I guess that would be another. I'm trying to think if there was anybody else. What about Rita Pougiales?

**Fiksdal:** Oh, yeah. She was a student. You're better at this than I am, thinking back. But I think you're the only college dropout that became a dean.

**Ryan:** Oh, wow! That could be. [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** Now that I know your story. But you were successful and ended up at Rutgers. That's pretty darn good.

**Ryan:** That wasn't a hard program to get into, but it was a good one to get into. Even though it was an evening and weekend program itself, and most of the people attending it were in union jobs. Some of them had been union staff or were currently, and some of them were [union members], like there were some autoworkers there who were UAW.

**Fiksdal:** A public university?

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** I was just thinking about the cost of tuition.

**Ryan:** Rutgers is the state university of New Jersey, but they had a tuition policy with their graduate programs where they kept out-of-state tuition low because they wanted to get out-of-state students. It's really interesting because it has one of those one-word names, so people don't think of it was a public. It's like Cornell. Cornell has certain schools that get public funding. Cornell is the home of the New York Institute for Industrial Relations, and their labor and industrial relations programs are publicly

funded, so those are lower tuition and more accessible, but it's all smashed together with Cornell as the private college.

**Fiksdal:** That's very interesting. I didn't know that about Rutgers.

**Ryan:** It's got a lot of quality faculty that are certainly the caliber of Columbia and Princeton and all that. One interesting thing is when I went there, it was during the transition of the Clinton administration. I call it the brain center for D.C. in public policy—that northeast to D.C. triangle. That's always where you hear the new policy ideas. We had speakers from the new administration at our program right away, or people called in to consult.

Sue Cobble went to the Inauguration. I was working as a grader for her and a research assistant. I had to take her to the airport and review her outfit. She got invited to the one of the Inauguration balls.

**Fiksdal:** Fabulous.

**Ryan:** She was going as a plus-one with her housemate, [Ann Markison? 01:58:52], who used to be Clinton's old girlfriend before he married Hillary.

**Fiksdal:** They would be noticed, yeah. [laughter] That's a pretty big deal. A good story.

**Ryan:** Yeah. [Ann Markison] was really interesting. She tried to convince me to switch my major to economics. Her expertise was in conversion of war production to peacetime production. That was her research area. I thought that was really interesting.

**Fiksdal:** We're nearing the end of the interview and I wanted to ask you, where do you think Evergreen is going? What suggestions would you have—I've heard a couple—about older adults? To listen to faculty would be key. I'm wondering if there are other things that you would like to emphasize or talk about?

**Ryan:** I think one of the most attractive things about Evergreen, especially when students get in and understand, is the flexibility and the creativity, and the fact that you can be an adult and get treated like an adult at Evergreen, and that we really do succeed in building learning communities. They are tremendously important for people's persistence and success, networking, everything like that.

We're much more under competition. Almost every adult student that I met with over the last several years had been heavily recruited by the for-profits or the onlines. If you even click something on the Internet for Phoenix or Western Governors University, they are all over you. All over you. They will keep calling and not let you go and hold your hand and fill out your financial aid applications and get your federal student aid and blah blah blah. Yet all they have to offer is a relationship with a machine.

Western Governors will not share their dropout rates, but they're outcompeting us, and they are driving students out of higher education as much as they are being accessible. I think we have to really not try to compete with them on their own territory. Evergreen really needs to make so much more of its outreach face to face, with actual publications, so people don't have to go Web surfing on their own at night to see what they're doing, and really emphasize the deep involvement, the hands-on, and the creativity.

I think with all this Pathway stuff, one thing that we really haven't done that I think has so much potential is put out the idea that you can create your own degree and that you can do individualized study. But that means faculty will have to be mentors for people and will have to take on what they might consider uncompensated advising duties. But I think it's the only way to build back enrollment.

If Walmart is your competitor and you're the local hardware store, you're not going to compete with them on the same basis. We're not going to compete with Western Governors by trying to be them, or Phoenix, or certificate programs. The University of Washington has hundreds of certificate programs. They're all online. You can't use financial aid for them. If they're non-credit, you can't get financial aid for them.

But we can't compete with what they already have and what they already have is a brand name and a constituency and a faculty and all that kind of stuff, so it's got to be a different strategy. It seems to be, the more these are competitors, the harder we go to try to be narrow careerist or all online.

**Fiksdal:** But on our Web site, it still says liberal arts, so that's a confusing thing, I think.

**Ryan:** Right. I think, like what you said, you need to explain what a liberal arts degree is. And much more emphasize the stories of our students who are successful, the alums.

**Fiksdal:** They don't have to be famous, although we've got plenty of famous ones.

**Ryan:** Right. Not everybody's going to be Macklemore or the Director of the Department of Ecology, Maia Bellon. But we have so many wonderful stories. They're much more in the *Alumni Magazine* than they ever were in the Admissions materials, and I never understood that.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, that's really odd. Maia was a student in my program as a freshman, by the way.

[laughter]

**Ryan:** That's great. That would be what I—I worry that the student of their imagination is a very limited being and it's not the people that I know we've been successful with.

**Fiksdal:** That's really useful advice, I think. Very helpful.

**Ryan:** That's all I can say, but I've been saying that for years and have not felt like the message is taking.



**Fiksdal:** It's been a tough haul, when you think about it. I was the first dean of what now is Evening and Weekend Studies. Nobody wanted to listen to me at the deans' meetings. It all got taken up with fulltime issues. That was more faculty and more problems and all that, but I got so annoyed by that, by not being thought of as important, our work was not.

And yet, as you say, we had full classes. Parttime Studies was in demand. We had excellent teaching. We had faculty who were planning a whole curriculum. In fulltime, that was never the case. You can never get faculty that go beyond their own world and their own friends' worlds. That's what you have to do as a dean, so you were all mini-deans, really, all along. [laughing]

**Ryan:** Some of us. And I think, just putting it into perspective, there are just deep class biases in higher ed that come out in funny ways. Part of it is that when people imagine working adults, they think they're dummies, or have limited imaginations, or have limited stories. Which is why, when I did my emeritus speech, I tried to tell the stories of the actual people, and that they didn't want a certificate in project management. They became teachers and lawyers and union organizers and creative public employees.

**Fiksdal:** Just like younger students, you never know what they're going to become. That's the point of a liberal arts education. It creates the foundation for you.

**Ryan:** The status of the program—I'm trying to be a little philosophical—in higher ed, status contingency attaches to who you teach for faculty and for administrators who you administer. It doesn't matter who you are as a scholar or something, if you taught at an Oberlin or a Harvard, your status is enhanced by the social status of your students, of the imagined social statuses. Whereas if you teach at a community or technical college, or you teach working adults, you're assumed to be less of an esteemed person, and maybe not as skilled of a teacher, or as good of an intellectual.

**Fiksdal:** That's really distressing, Sarah. I don't like that.

**Ryan:** It is, though. If somebody said I was a community college teacher, you could be the most amazing sociologist in the world, but your status would attach to the kinds of students that you teach.

**Fiksdal:** I did think about the status of the adjunct quite a bit because one of the reasons Barbara wanted to staff Evening and Weekend Studies with adjuncts was that you paid them less, so it's a moneymaker. That was the whole thing. She talked about it a lot. And she comes from management, and she was Provost, and that's what she wanted to do.

We started on that basis, and then I didn't like it because how do you get adjuncts to care about the college? You're not paying them very much. You're not valuing them. They had no one listening to

them or, observing their teaching, and caring about their teaching, and giving them opportunities to do better.

I've noticed over the years that a lot of people have very prestigious positions, and then they're an adjunct at a university. For them, being an adjunct is like a high-prestige thing. Why at Evergreen can't we change that notion and make it an additional and wonderful opportunity for people to come in and teach? They come into, say, the MPA program. I don't know. But I've always felt that part of it was the language, since I care about language so much. And how we define that in our own institution is very different than other places.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** Thank you, Sarah. This has been very revealing and helpful. I really appreciate your time.

**Ryan:** Thank you. I will record it and I'll send the link to you and to the person that I'm supposed to send it to [on Anthony? 02:11:03].

**Fiksdal:** Okay, and just let me know if there are any troubles, because I think this worked very well.