

**John Perkins**  
**Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
**May 10, 2022**  
**FINAL**

**Fiksdal:** This is Susan Fiksdal. I'm interviewing John Perkins on May 10, 2020. [Transcriber assumes she meant 2022.] Welcome, John. This is part of the oral history project that the college is doing, and we're happy that you could help out with it. I want to start with your childhood, where you grew up, whether you moved around a lot, what your parents did, that sort of thing.

**Perkins:** I came into this world in Phoenix, Arizona, which at the time was a little bitty town of 30,000, in a place that had only been a state for 30 years. Phoenix had half the population of the state. We lived there until I was four.

I had been thinking more recently, why in the heck did my dad end up in Phoenix? And my mom went where my dad did. He had the job. The only thing I can figure out—and it's partly speculation, but partly informed by what his career was—he worked for a wholesale appliance distributor—Maytag—and they had been given, by the Maytag factory in Iowa, the Rocky Mountain area, which included Arizona. I think my father must have been sent to Arizona because they had nothing there, and Arizona didn't really have much.

Phoenix is this gosh-awful metropolis of well over a million people, traffic jams galore, sprawled all over the place. It was a tiny little town, but it was the capital. It was a state. It had two senators. It didn't have any Maytag dealers. That's the key. I think the boss said [to my dad], "Henry, you go down to Arizona and you get Maytag established in Arizona."

**Fiksdal:** That sounds like a pretty important job, and in a small market, a tough one.

**Perkins:** It is. He always said, "I hate Sears & Roebuck because they always undercut us in price. We have quality." It's really true—the Maytag repairman, who sits in the TV ad snoozing because there's nothing to do.

**Fiksdal:** I remember those ads. [laughter]

**Perkins:** Maytags were pretty good machines.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, so do you have one now?

**Perkins:** No, we don't.

**Fiksdal:** You're not a loyal customer.

**Perkins:** We were for years, but when we bought this house in California, it already had a washer/dryer, and we weren't about to move one out and move another one in.

**Fiksdal:** No, of course not. So, you lived there until you were four, and then did you move around some more?

**Perkins:** No. My father ended up in Colorado Springs, where my mother was. My father's family moved around quite a bit. My father was born in Pensacola, Florida, but his dad, my grandfather, had tuberculosis. In fact, that's why he had been sent to Pensacola. At the time, there were no antibiotics. He had tuberculosis.

They said, "Go to Florida. It's warmer. That'll be good for you." But then the medical professional apparently changed and said, "All that humidity in Florida is not good for you. Go to Colorado where it's dry." So, my grandfather moved his family to Boulder, where he had an older brother, apparently.

A few years later—I don't really know when—they moved to Colorado Springs, so my dad spent a lot of time growing up in Colorado Springs. Went to high school in Colorado Springs. My mother's family came out of Kansas. They were in Colorado Springs. To make along story short, they got married and had two kids. I'm one of them. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. Colorado Springs is a nice area.

**Perkins:** When I was there, it was a town of 30,000. It's now 350,00 or a half million. It used to be definitely one of the smaller cities of Colorado. Now, it's second only to Denver. It's an absolutely Republican dominated county. Absolutely. Democrats hardly run in Colorado Springs because they can't win. A few do but not very many.

**Fiksdal:** So, you were raised in a conservative area.

**Perkins:** Yes, and I grew up thinking everybody's a Republican. Of course, I'm a Republican. Later, I discovered I wasn't. [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** Let's try to remember to get to that turning point. I assume you graduated from high school in Colorado Springs.

**Perkins:** Yes. In fact, I was in the first graduating class of Palmer High School, which before that was Colorado Springs High School, because it was the only one. But Colorado Springs, by the time I graduated, had grown, and they built a second high school. For heaven's sakes.

My high school class was actually split. About half went off to the new one and we were in the district that stayed with the old Palmer one. William J. Palmer was a Civil War general who came after the Civil War to Colorado. He founded Colorado Springs, so there was a great, big statue of Palmer

outside of the high school and they called it Palmer High School. I've often wondered, what's Palmer's real record? I don't know. But after the war, he was an entrepreneur real estate dealer, and he probably made out very well.

**Fiksdal:** No doubt. What do you think made you think about college?

**Perkins:** I never thought about it. My dad said I was going. [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** You and your sister?

**Perkins:** I think the same way. But the idea of going out and getting a job after high school, I'll take college any day. This is not a hard choice.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. You didn't work during high school in summers?

**Perkins:** I worked in the summers. I didn't work during the school year. I mowed lawns. I painted fences. I do have a story, and I'll blame my cousin on it.

My father did well enough that he owned a Cadillac. When I said, "I've got a lawn mowing job up the street. Can I take the car to go mow the lawn?" He said, "Sure." I put the lawn mower in the trunk of the Cadillac, and my cousin said, "You're the only yard man I know who arrives in a Cadillac to unload his lawn mower." [laughing] I, at the time, thought, well, yeah. Sure. Later, I thought, that was really weird.

**Fiksdal:** But I guess they paid you the same.

**Perkins:** They paid me the same. I think I got a dollar an hour or something like that.

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

**Perkins:** That was a big deal. I was very happy. Colorado Springs is a tourist trap if you really want to know the answer, but it had a couple of tourist attractions, one of which was Seven Falls. My dad had a guy who used to work at Maytag who then became a general manager of Seven Falls, so when my dad asked [whether] my sister could have a job at Seven Falls, the answer was yes. When I got old enough, "Can I have a job at Seven Falls?" "Yes."

This was called affirmative action without any affirmative action label. But it was word-of-mouth advertising. Those jobs were never advertised in public. They were just filled.

**Fiksdal:** A lot of networking. Well, it was a small town, too.

**Perkins:** It was a small town. The job at Seven Falls was—it's in a canyon. At the end of the canyon, there's this waterfall. The parking is very tight in this canyon. It's a very narrow canyon. Our job was to make sure that all these yahoo tourists that came up parked between the lines. [laughing]

I would tell these irate people from Texas and Iowa and Kansas, "I'm sorry. You really didn't get between the lines, and it's very important because you're taking up two spaces, and we don't have extra

spaces. Can you please re-park?" They'd try again. They wouldn't make it again. "I'm sorry, you really didn't make it yet."

**Fiksdal:** Oh, my goodness! [laughter] But at least there was someone explaining. When Jane Jervis became President, she got a parking ticket for not parking straight between the lines.

**Perkins:** I could have told her that you Can't. You have to park between the lines.

**Fiksdal:** We had parking people who were sticklers at Evergreen. Let's go back. I'm sorry to go forward. Did you want to go to college in Colorado? Where did you end up going?

**Perkins:** At the time I was more influenced by the Republican Party, and even the John Birch Society. Barry Goldwater was my hero for a while. I thought, I'm not going to a public college. I want to go to a private college. My dad didn't say anything. He said, "If you can get in, fine."

I tried. I didn't get into Harvard or Stanford as a freshman, so I went to my backup, which was Vanderbilt in Nashville, Tennessee. Why Vanderbilt? My dad had a first cousin who lived in Kentucky, and she said, "Vanderbilt's a good school. You should apply there." So, I did. Harvard and Stanford didn't like me, so they said, "No."

I went off the Vanderbilt. This was 1960. Vanderbilt was still a segregated university, except for the Divinity School. The university had decided God didn't like segregation, so it took black students into the Divinity School. But the rest was pure white. It was one of those they asked for a photo, and if you were a black kid, and put a picture of a black kid on your application, the answer was, "No, you can't come."

**Fiksdal:** Did you know that before you went?

**Perkins:** I didn't think about it. That was a problem. I had some good faculty and some bad faculty at Vanderbilt. It was a good university. It is a good university. Still is. But I decided I didn't really like the segregation.

When all my high school buddies came back at Christmastime, we compared notes. I discovered something I thought was appalling, which is the only term paper I wrote in my first semester at Vanderbilt was for ROTC. I thought I wanted to be in the Army, for some reason. They all came back and [talked about] all the papers they had to write at all these colleges, and I thought, well, I expected to be asked to write papers in college. So, I got very irate at Vanderbilt for not requiring writing, and I didn't like the segregation.

So, I applied to Amherst College and got in. I changed to Amherst the next year and went as a sophomore. I think Amherst took all my credits except ROTC. They didn't do ROTC at Amherst. But everything else, they did.

Suddenly, I was writing papers for every course. I got what I wanted, which is the way I thought college ought to be. You have to learn to write. I didn't know why you had to learn to write. I knew that if you went to college, you had to learn to write, and Amherst made me learn to write.

I appreciated it, and I had mostly really good faculty at Amherst. A couple of so-so faculty. One turkey—I can't remember his name, but I didn't like him—in the English Department. That was the end of me taking anything from any English Department ever again. I graduated from Amherst. Do you want to know more about Amherst?

Oh, I can tell you why I stopped becoming a Republican. Do you want to know?

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, I want to know that, and I want to know your major.

**Perkins:** Okay. I'll tell you why I stopped being a Republican. This was, by then, '62, '63, '64. The Civil Rights Movement was heating up. It wasn't quite as it got during the later '60s, but it was definitely on the rise, and there was activity at Amherst.

Mississippi Summer, sending Amherst students down to help voter registration in the South. Speakers coming up. The segregation thing was broken. Amherst was integrated. It was not without its problems of racism, as all of my black classmates will tell you. Some of it was really horrendous, and the white students didn't endure it.

**Fiksdal:** Was it recently segregated?

**Perkins:** No, I don't think it had ever been segregated, and I think they had started taking black students.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, just taking more students. I see.

**Perkins:** I couldn't tell you when the first black students first arrived at Amherst. It may have been a long time ago, because I think a lot of Congregational ministers went to Amherst for their training as undergraduates. It was a secular school but had kind of New England-ish roots that were religious.

At any rate, I was falling in sync with the civil rights things. That's got to be done. I remember there were a group of us that went down to lobby our senators. There were three of us from Colorado, and we went down and lobbied Peter Dominick, who was a Republican senator from Colorado.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, even I know his name. He was there for a long time.

**Perkins:** He was. My stepmother was a very active Republican, and she had helped get Peter Dominick elected. So, when I contacted him and said who my stepmother was, of course we got in. We went in and told him he ought to vote for the Civil Rights Act, and he hummed and hawed and didn't really want to commit himself one way or the other. I actually don't know whether he ever did or not.

While I was a senior, one of my friends came up to me and said, “You say you’re a Goldwater Republican. You are not. You are already a Democrat. You just don’t know it.” I said, “Nonsense. I’m a Republican.” He said, “We’re going up to your room where we’re going to talk.”

We went up to my room in the dorm, and for the next six hours, we had this long discussion. At the end, I walked out and said, “I’m a Democrat.” It was an overnight transformation, but I’d already been a Democrat for years.

**Fiksdal:** That is so interesting. Wasn’t Goldwater running in 1964?

**Perkins:** He was the presidential candidate.

**Fiksdal:** That’s what I thought, so that was a significant year to suddenly switch.

**Perkins:** Yes, and when I was a student at Vanderbilt, the Vice President of the United States came through on some sort of rally or something or other, that Vice President being Richard M. Nixon. I went downtown in Nashville, and I was this far from Richard Nixon. And he looked smarmy at the time.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, really?

**Perkins:** But I was a Republican, I thought. At Vanderbilt, I also learned—raised Episcopalian, I thought, I’m off in college. I’ll try to be a good Episcopalian. I found myself going off to church, and then I started listening to the various creeds the Episcopalians say. I said, “I don’t agree with that part of it,” so I would leave that part of it out. I wouldn’t say that part.

Then I decided, I don’t believe in any of it. [laughing] Then I decided, oh, I guess I’m not an Episcopalian either. So, I became a secular Democrat.

**Fiksdal:** College makes you start to think on your own and it can be shocking. I guess your parents might not have been too happy. But let’s go back to college and what you graduated in. What was your degree?

**Perkins:** Biological sciences.

**Fiksdal:** That’s a surprise. What was your minor?

**Perkins:** Amherst didn’t have minors. There is a very fundamental part of the Amherst curriculum that you could say I either had it, took it, or endured it, which is very important to my own educational philosophy, when you want to get into that.

**Fiksdal:** I guess we’ll wait a little, because this is formative. The fact that you never took any more English classes is sad to me, but I understand that.

**Perkins:** Well, it wasn’t sad to me. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** No, but you did start to write books. Going back, did you decide to get a job, or did you decide to go on to graduate school?

**Perkins:** I don't think there was ever a doubt in my mind once I discovered—I started looking at my professors at Amherst particularly, and I thought, huh, I think I'd like to have a job like that. That looks like a good thing to do with your life. For me, there was never any question that I would go to graduate school. It never dawned on me. The other thing that didn't dawn on me was, how does one pay for a graduate education?

**Fiksdal:** I was going to ask that, because your parents allowed you to go to a private school, then an out-of-state school, and travel back and forth. Yeah, it's expensive.

**Perkins:** It was expensive, and my dad had always been very clear. "I'm going to get you through undergraduate school. Then, it's up to you."

But I was lucky. I think you're enough younger. Maybe the time had already passed by the time you came along, but Sputnik had put a fire under the butt of the United States government.

**Fiksdal:** 1957, right? I was alive. [laughing] I really remember it. It was a big deal. Everybody was worried we were behind, the Russians were ahead, and that mattered.

**Perkins:** Yes. What the Congress did was they passed this enormous appropriation to finance graduate education in sciences. I applied to the National Science Foundation, [and] got a pre-doctoral fellowship. Had that for two years. I was at Harvard by then doing graduate work. My advisor said, "NSF is a little squirrely now. I think you ought to apply to NIH, the National Institutes of Health."

They had a lot of pre-doctoral fellowships, so I got an NIH fellowship for the last two years. I waltzed out of college not with any debt—my dad paid for everything—and waltzed right into the federal government saying, "We want PhD scientists." So, I walked out of graduate school never having paid a dime.

**Fiksdal:** I have never heard of pre-doc fellowships—maybe they do exist—but I've heard plenty about post-docs. That's a good history lesson.

**Perkins:** Yeah, the pre-doctoral fellowships were amazing. They paid you a stipend plus all tuition.

**Fiksdal:** And room and board? What did you do about that?

**Perkins:** The stipend covered the room and board.

**Fiksdal:** Nice. And you didn't have to teach?

**Perkins:** Unless you wanted to, or unless your institution required it.

**Fiksdal:** Wow. I did some student teaching. I do not think I did a very good job, in retrospect, but that's a different story. But the idea that it could come out of undergraduate school, go to graduate school, and come out without any debt, by the time our kids came along, that . . .

**Fiksdal:** . . . was no longer a possibility. That sounds pretty great. And you got into Harvard, which is a big deal, since you had tried once. That must have been very satisfying to get in.

**Perkins:** I think that's why I wanted to go. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** No doubt. Maybe you weren't thinking about this at the time, but I'm sure you were supposed to do a lot of major research, and that was your dissertation. Did you get any training in teaching, or did they think, oh, you just do research, and then you go off and do research somewhere else?

**Perkins:** There was an interlude. I went to Stanford for my first year of graduate school, again, maybe because I was piqued. They didn't let me in. I'll show them. I'll go as a graduate student.

**Fiksdal:** You went to both of them. [laughter]

**Perkins:** I was so annoyed with both of them.

**Fiksdal:** Yes, but why only one year at Stanford?

**Perkins:** I thought fungi sounded pretty interesting, and there was a fungal geneticist at Stanford at the time, a faculty member. His name happened to be Perkins. We didn't think we had any known relatives, but undoubtedly, in the past, we probably did.

I started doing a little work, and this was before I really knew what I wanted to do as a graduate student. The genetics was really exploding in the '60s. This was the era of DNA being discovered as the genetic material, and the fungus *Neurospora*—a bread mold—was one of the major organisms. Dr. Perkins—Professor Perkins—worked on *Neurospora*. I thought, well, I'll go in and discover how you actually deal with this.

A professor visiting California named John Raper came by Perkins' lab, so I was introduced to Raper. He was from Harvard. Raper was doing also fungal genetics. He gave a talk on what he was doing, and I thought, golly, that sounds so cool.

Maybe I wrote him a letter afterwards and said, "Any chance I could come and work in your lab for my PhD?" He said, "Yes," so I transferred to Harvard, mainly because I thought his work looked so interesting. So, it wasn't entirely being piqued at Harvard. There was a research reason.

**Fiksdal:** But you were very privileged because you were at Stanford, and they had such researchers coming through talking. You wouldn't have known that if you were somewhere else.

**Perkins:** No, I wouldn't have. In fact, the work that Raper's lab was doing was, oh my gosh, among biologists, the number of people who even know about the genetics of sexuality of the higher Basidiomycetes is really small.

**Fiksdal:** I bet, since I can hardly decipher that.

**Perkins:** These fungi have a very interesting sex life. Under genetic control.



**Fiksdal:** I'm so glad there was something interesting to study there. You were in a very specialized area.

**Perkins:** Yes, very specialized.

**Fiksdal:** What did that mean? You have to establish a lab to continue that kind of work. What happened next after your PhD?

**Perkins:** What happened next started before I got my PhD. I'll say one more thing about the specialization. It turned out when I got to the lab, Raper had five or six graduate students, post-docs. He got post-docs occasionally coming through, spending sabbaticals with him. I looked around and I saw the work on the mating types. What strains of *Schizophyllum commune* were compatible and could mate with each other.

That work, I thought, this is coming to a close, because they had worked out the genetic control. I thought, I don't want to start something in that area, so I thought, I'll look at the next stage. You have these molds, and they grow together, and they mate, if they're compatible, and the genetics control the compatibility.

But the next thing the thing does, it creates a mushroom. I thought, there's no work going on on this mushroom, so I'll work on the next step, the mushroom. What happens after a compatible pair meet and you get fertility?

I did a bunch of experiments on forming the mushroom and discovered—I didn't discover that light encouraged the mushroom to form, because that was already known, but we didn't know what kind of light—red light, blue light, green light. That's important because you have to know what colors of light cause the fruiting to happen in order to find out, what is absorbing the light? I thought, I'll work on what forms of light does it absorb? Turns out, it's blue light. That was important.

I also got interested in, are there any genes that control the formation of the mushroom? Based on some hints I got from people in the lab, it looked like there probably were. And indeed, I found at least three genes that control the formation of the mushroom.

Then I thought, what happens to the cells in the mushroom? As the fungus is growing, it's just all these little threads of hyphae. They're not sticking together. But in the mushroom, the cells all stick together. What does that look like under the microscope, and what can you tell if you do microscopic studies? So, I looked at when it formed aggregates of cells to form a mushroom.

That's probably more information than you ever wanted to know about mushroom formation in [unintelligible 00:33:40].

**Fiksdal:** I know a lot now about at least one mushroom. [laughter] I have questions, but I'm not going to delve into them here.

**Perkins:** That work, as fun as it was—truly enjoyable—there was stuff happening outside the lab that really grabbed my attention, and ultimately, took my attention away. It started with civil rights and Vietnam. I got very active in the antiwar movement in the Cambridge, Mass. area. I was a part of the draft resistance movement. Got in trouble with my draft board for my efforts. Was ordered to report for induction. I was going to refuse induction.

But they sent you to the physical first, and the first thing they did was sent me to the optometrist to see if you could see. I could have told him, no, I can't see a thing. I've been wearing glasses since I was five. It turns out, they think I'm too blind to ever be in the Army, except in times of national emergency. If there was a national emergency, I could have been drafted, and they probably would have put me in the back office where I wouldn't do any danger to the people around me.

At any rate, I got very involved in the antiwar movement, and I decided, I don't want to go out and be a bench biologist. I don't want to start a lab. I don't even necessarily want to teach biological sciences to freshman, and maybe a specialized course to upper classmen and graduate students. I looked around and I said, there's a lot of controversy over science in society, so I will do that.

I was helped a great deal. As part of my antiwar work, I worked for the American Friends Service Committee for two years on draft counseling on antiwar work. One of the local Quakers was a Harvard faculty member in history of science, Everett Mendelsohn. I was talking to Everett one day because he asked, "What are you going to do after you work for the Friends Service Committee?" I said, "I don't know. I'm interested in science and society." He said, "You should come to work in the history of science because if you work in history and science, you can do anything you want about science in society." I thought, that sounds like my kind of folks. I'd like to do that.

Then he said the real hooker. "And I'm on this board of the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation that is now sponsoring post-doctoral fellowships to PhD scientists who want to change into history of science." I said, "You really are my type of folk."

**Fiksdal:** Wow. What a story.

**Perkins:** I got what I hoped was going to be a two-year post-doctoral, but it was one year at a time. Everett's term on the board of this foundation ended after my first year, so when the Foundation asked me, did I want a second year? I said, "Yes." They said, "You need to apply. Tell us what you're going to do."

I had all this stuff. I had decided to work on the history of DDT, because that was the hot stuff on the environment when I was a post-doc. I'd started this work on the history of DDT, and the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation really had an interest in medicine, not the sciences in general. I applied and said,

“The second year of post-doc, I want to finish this work to write some sort of history about DDT.” They looked at my application and said, “No, we don’t do that.”

There I was, in the spring of 1971. We had a three-month-old baby. Suddenly, my employment prospects looked like zero. It was too late to apply for a faculty job for the following fall. Those positions had already been filled. The few history of science departments had already put out enough recent PhDs. There weren’t any job openings in the history of science anyhow.

I thought, what the hell am I going to do? Like a good post-doctoral, there was a history of biology conference down at Yale that spring, so I said, “I should write a paper and go tell them what I found out in my first year of research.”

I went down to Yale, gave my presentation on my preliminary work on DDT, the insecticide, and this ecologist from Yale named Evelyn Hutchinson—whose name I knew because of the work I had done in ecology; I knew Evelyn Hutchinson’s name as a famous ecologist—I was very pleased—he came up to me afterwards to ask some questions.

Then he said, “I’m in the National Academy of Sciences and I’m on the Environmental Studies Board, and we’re starting a study on the problems of pest control because we don’t think the studies on DDT have been very good up to now.” And he was right. They hadn’t been very good. “Would you like to play a role in the study?” Facing unemployment? “Oh, yes, I’d be very interested. You betcha.”  
[laughter]

I suddenly—pure serendipity—had a job offer. We moved to Washington on April 30. Arrived at huge May Day antiwar protests. This was when Nixon had just bombed Cambodia. It was very clear Nixon was not going to end the war. So, May Day of 1971, the traffic in Washington—they blocked all the bridges. Everything was shut down. Helicopters were going all over the place.

That’s what we woke up to Sunday, May 1. We were staying at a friend’s apartment, as they were away. That was our welcome to Washington, D.C. Long story short, I spent the next three years as what are now called study directors of the National Academy of Sciences studies. I truly regarded that as my second graduate education. That, plus the post-doc year I had at Harvard in history of science.

**Fiksdal:** Because you had to actually design the studies?

**Perkins:** Yeah, I had to design the studies, and it was pure science and society. We had to bring in politics, and economics, plus the biology of insect control, weed control, plant pathogen controls. I had to learn about agriculture, forestry, the role of insecticides in public health—for example, DDT was famous as a public health. It killed malaria-bearing mosquitoes. It was a big deal. Later, it turned out to be a real health hazard, but its first fame was as a health additive.

But it really was my second graduate education. It's the graduate education, when I got done, I thought, yes, now I think I know what I'd like to do.

**Fiksdal:** It also sounds very interdisciplinary.

**Perkins:** Highly.

**Fiksdal:** Did you pull those people together, or were they there? I don't quite understand that part.

**Perkins:** The getting of the committee to write [unintelligible 00:43:09]?

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, all those other disciplines. Did you figure out, oh, we need this, we need that, or people told you this is what you need?

**Perkins:** I was a staff person for the Environmental Studies Board, which was a board of people from the biological, the physical sciences, economics, political science, sociology, medicine. It was a very interdisciplinary board.

Evelyn Hutchinson was on that board. The Department of Agriculture had really made a botch of dealing with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, and they had. Because the Department of Agriculture just saw pesticides as a tool, they saw Carson as the enemy, and so they put out a bunch of studies that talked about all of the benefits but none of the downsides of pesticides.

The Environmental Studies Board said, "We need something new. Yes, there are benefits, and yes, there are downsides. How do you balance?" The first suggestions for people who should be on the committee came from members of the Environmental Studies Board. I quizzed all of them and they gave me all these suggestions.

It turns out, I actually identified the chair of the committee. He wasn't suggested. Donald Kennedy was a biologist at Stanford. I'd know who he was when I was a graduate student there but didn't really know him. But Kennedy put out a pamphlet with a couple of other people on the use of herbicides in Vietnam as a weapon of war. I don't know if you know much about that.

To make the long story short, if I can, the Defense Department, as they were trying their best to do what they called "win in Vietnam," had a portion of the program, which was two-part: Vietnam had a lot of forests, and a lot of the infiltration of people from the North, the North Vietnamese—arms and soldiers—came down the Ho Chi Minh Trail into South Vietnam. It was really hidden from airplanes.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, I know that part.

**Perkins:** It's a jungle.

**Fiksdal:** Are you talking about agent orange or some other type?

**Perkins:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** I do know something about agent orange.

**Perkins:** They were using agent orange, and there were several other agents they were using, first, to defoliate. Then they got the US Forest Service involved in, how can you set these trees up where we can cause massive forest fires in Vietnam? If you can't call this genocidal in nature, you're missing something.

Kennedy and a couple of people at Stanford wrote this pamphlet on why it was such a travesty to think that you could defoliate all of Vietnam and burn the forests down. Also, they were defoliating the rice crops, to starve the Vietnamese rebels out of food.

**Fiksdal:** Only the rebels, of course.

**Perkins:** Only the rebels, of course. I looked at this pamphlet and I said, "I think Kennedy is who ought to head this study." I contacted him and he agreed to do the study, so I worked with Don Kennedy for the next three years. We put out a five-volume set of reports, which was the finest set of reports on pesticides that had ever been written to date. And had no effect. Well, there was one minor effect.

**Fiksdal:** But it was a politically charged time.

**Perkins:** It was very politically charged. One thing I didn't know, partly because of the way the National Academies treated staff members at the time, my boss at the Academy basically said, "You're a staff person. You don't have opinions. The Committee has opinions. Your job is to get the Committee together, support their work, and keep your mouth shut." He discovered I had a big mouth and wasn't afraid to mouth off sometimes. He said, basically, "Shut up and do your job."

When it came time to do the work of getting our report into the agencies where it would be paid attention to, the person who does that now is what they call a staff officer. They have the duty of taking the report into the public [unintelligible 00:48:56]. I was told to shut up, and the staff officer didn't do that.

We left the report out there and it went nowhere because Kennedy was off doing other things. Then I got a job teaching at Miami of Ohio, so I was off. There was no continuity of staff effort to push that report out into Congress and the agencies. That's a failing I now recognize as I was the person to do it, but I left Washington.

**Fiksdal:** But it's the system.

**Perkins:** It was the system, and I was told not to do it.

**Fiksdal:** It's ridiculous to spend—think of the government. They spent all that money, all that expertise, and then they did nothing with the report. That's certainly not your fault.

**Perkins:** I now know that I should have been the one to do more and didn't set it up that way. I'm probably going on at too great a length.

**Fiksdal:** No, all this is very formative for thinking about Evergreen. You went to the University of Ohio at Miami. Is that where you stayed and got tenure?

**Perkins:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** I happen to know a little about it because I went to Ann Arbor late in life. Then you learn a little bit about the Midwest. [laughter]

**Perkins:** That's right. You're from Michigan, aren't you?

**Fiksdal:** I'm not from there. I went there for my PhD, and I wasn't into football, but you learn.

**Perkins:** When I was at the Academy, and I knew our study was drawing to an end. Now, I know what I want to go do, and I thought it was environmental studies. I still do. There was this ad that appeared in *Science Magazine*, which I was avidly reading the ads every week to see, gosh, is anybody out there hiring somebody that might look like me? I saw this ad that said, "We are starting a new, interdisciplinary college at Miami of Ohio. It will have specialties in environmental studies and American studies." I thought, whoa! Where have you been all my life? This is the kind of job I want. I wasn't really all that interested in working with PhD students. I thought I really wanted to do undergraduates more.

I applied and they hired me. We were six people plus a dean and an assistant dean to start this new division of Miami of Ohio that was going to be like the college of arts and science and the engineering college. They had a couple of other colleges at Miami of Ohio. It's a big state university down by Cincinnati.

**Fiksdal:** Let's stop for a moment.

[00:52:38 through 00:53:30]

**Fiksdal:** We're at Miami University where they had a brand-new interdisciplinary studies program in environmental science. I didn't know they had that. You got to be in on the formation of that.

**Perkins:** Yes, the only people that had been hired before I got there were the dean and the assistant dean. We arrived in July, and we had to create a curriculum, and receive students in September.

**Fiksdal:** From July to September?

**Perkins:** We had to create the curriculum and get ready for the incoming freshman class. We were going to take on new class per year.

**Fiksdal:** It sounds so much like Evergreen.

**Perkins:** If you want to know about my educational philosophy, this is where it came to pass. There had been a planning committee at Miami that sketched out a few things. They said American studies and environmental studies [for? 00:54:59] majors, and the first-year curriculum shall be a course in natural

science, social science, and humanities. Three courses required. Then the students could take one elective in the college of arts and science or anywhere else in Miami. The second year was going to be the same: a natural science, social science, and humanities course required, and another elective. Then the last two years were to be electives plus a thesis.

When I arrived at Amherst, Amherst freshmen and sophomores were still mandated to take what was called the core curriculum. Everybody in their freshman year took physics and calculus, the natural sciences; they took something in social sciences, I don't know what because I didn't go there as a freshman; and they took English as a humanities.

The second year, everybody was required to take another natural science course, and they could pick chemistry, physics, biology, geology, whatever they wanted. They got a little choice, but they had to take a science. They had to take American studies, a required sophomore course, and they had to take something in the humanities, their choice. Plus, you always got an elective, totally your choice.

I happened to fall in love with the Amherst core curriculum because I thought, wow, as a foundation in the liberal arts, to be required to take two years of natural science, two years of social science, two years of humanities, and then you had to take two years of a foreign language at some point. I thought that is the way to educate students.

When I arrived at Miami, and it was already sketched out—natural science, social science, and humanities—I thought, terrific. We'll go right in there. I taught with a physicist, Barbara Whitten. We did the natural science first year, physics and biology. They got a semester of physics and a semester of biological science. I had to be a teaching assistant—co-teacher—in physics. For heaven's sakes.

**Fiksdal:** Because you were team teaching, in fact. You weren't just doing your own courses.

**Perkins:** We were team teaching. During the first semester, I was the assistant teacher and Barbara was the physicist. But I'd had physics at Amherst. I'd actually had one year of physics, so I'd had the stuff we were going to be teaching. Thank goodness. It wasn't totally off the wall for me.

I still think that is one of the best ways of introducing students to interdisciplinary studies, and it's very coercive. By the end of the '60s, that core curriculum had been demolished at Amherst. Students rebelled after my class because that was civil rights and antiwar and students getting their voice, and everybody under the age of 25 being obnoxious and rebellious. The Amherst core curriculum disappeared. They wouldn't do it. The faculty didn't want to do it anymore either.

Too bad. I thought it was terrific, so I loved what we were doing at Miami. One of the things we did in that summer preparing for the fall was the dean was very interested in all the experimental education, so I heard about Evergreen that summer.

**Fiksdal:** What summer was that again? I've forgotten here.

**Perkins:** Summer of '74. Evergreen had been up and running a couple of years, but we read stuff from Evergreen, and from UC Santa Cruz, and Green Bay, Wisconsin, and Alma College in Michigan, and some of the other experimental [colleges].

**Fiksdal:** Old Dominican or something?

**Perkins:** Yeah, and New College in Florida.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, that's right.

**Perkins:** Hampshire College in the Amherst area. Those experimental colleges were all the rage in the late '60s. Miami was a little bit of a Johnny-come-lately, but its provost said, "Miami needs to come out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where it had been stuck since the end of the Civil War and get with the new wave of educational reform." He, the provost, pushed through starting the new interdisciplinary college, and the dean they hired came right out of Hampshire.

There was a synergy amongst all these experimental colleges. I really liked teaching in that college, but by the end of the second year, it was very clear that we were not going to start an environmental studies and an American studies major for our students. The faculty didn't want to do it. The students didn't want to do it. The dean never did want to do it, but he kept his mouth shut until fairly late in the game.

Suddenly, the college I had thought I was going to join to create an environmental studies major, it was thrown by the wayside, pretty much. I got irate. Besides that, after four years of a pretty grueling teaching experience, you combine a brand-new assistant professor, a brand-new college, the work weeks were horrendous.

I got an NSF grant to bring my post-doctoral work to some fruition, and I went out to UC Berkeley from Ohio on a leave of absence in my fifth year at Miami. Got tenure while I was gone, and Barbara got a job in Oakland as a health planner. I asked, "Can I have another year's leave?" I thought, oh, my gosh, talk about pushing your luck. But the dean said, "Okay, all right."

Then a job at Evergreen opened up during that year, and Evergreen had environmental studies. I applied and I got the dean's job at Evergreen.

**Fiksdal:** That's a pretty big deal. That's when you and I met, in your very first year, maybe even your first quarter, which I'm sure you remember.

**Perkins:** Were you a starting faculty?

**Fiksdal:** I was there forever. I'm from Olympia, so when I came back from Paris with my degree . . .

**Perkins:** That's right. You had already been at Evergreen.



**Fiksdal:** . . . in French, I was teaching. After seven years, I left and did a whole new thing in linguistics, and then came back. But I remember when you were hired as a very big deal because you were only the second person to be hired from the external world to be a dean. It's a pretty tough position. It was very hard for Barbara Smith. We became friends because we happened to have kids. There weren't that many—practically no faculty women with kids, so we became friendly.

When you arrived, I know that must have been really hard, especially for the faculty, because we all—as you probably realized quickly—thought we were running the college and the deans were just there to do whatever they did.

How did you feel about that? You were all excited to come to Evergreen, I understand that, but what happened when you got to Evergreen and met these faculty, who thought you were not that important, probably?

**Perkins:** And as soon as I became a faculty member, I realized the deans aren't very important.

[laughter]

**Fiksdal:** But at the time, it was a big deal. Right? You were a dean.

**Perkins:** It was a big deal. I thought, well, maybe do I want to do a lot of administration or not? I was always a little unsure. Turns out, I've always been ambivalent about it.

I got there, and I knew that the fact I came from the outside was a big deal. And it was a scary deal because Evergreen faculty didn't have tenure. I thought, I gave up tenure.

**Fiksdal:** This was 1976 or so?

**Perkins:** No, I arrived in 1980. I knew Barbara was the only previous dean hired from the outside. I also knew that the college was in an enrollment crisis. Dan Evans, I knew, had been brought in to save the college and repair its damaged reputation in the Legislature.

Byron [Youtz], who was my direct boss—the Provost—I think Dan had said, “We've got to get these enrollments up. That has to happen.” And it was the higher education coordinating board that said, “Start some new programs. Your baccalaureate degree programs are not drawing that well, so start master's programs.”

MPA was the first, and Byron had already launched, with Oscar Soule as the chair, the MES venture to bring enrollments up, and provide more services to the State of Washington, specifically to the State Capitol, where public administration, and an environmental studies with policy dimensions, was considered, oh, this is good for [State Capital? state capital? 01:07:17].

**Fiksdal:** This was a DTF, or the actual program?

**Perkins:** No, Oscar had added a DTF and they did a lot of planning, and their recommendation had been [to] start the MES program. That had been very controversial. I still think Russ Fox had not made his peace with it. There was worry that these graduate programs were going to take over and devour the undergraduate curriculum.

**Fiksdal:** I remember all of that. We didn't want graduate programs because the whole point was to teach undergraduates, from the very beginning. And the job was not to do research, but to teach.

**Perkins:** Yes. It turns out master's programs are not very good for research programs.

**Fiksdal:** No.

**Perkins:** They are sort of good, and there's a good reason to be publishing if you're going to teach in the master's program, but they're not PhD programs. They did not turn Evergreen into a research university. They offered basically classroom-based, with a little bit of research, master's degrees.

Master's degrees vary all over the map, from just coursework—take some more courses—to a small thesis or a project, to a big thesis. But it wasn't a research university, so I never feared that the master's programs were going to devour the curriculum, but there were a lot of faculty who feared it.

**Fiksdal:** You have to realize, too, graduate programs cost more money. There are a lot of issues there. You have to recruit people. It needs a recruiter that's separate from the undergraduate. I'm speaking as a dean, but they are more expensive.

**Perkins:** They are. My job as first year of dean, they had the usual deanly things. I was the budget person, which Barbara had been before me. She moved to the curriculum desk.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, so she was still there in the deans. That's good.

**Perkins:** Oh, yeah. She was very important in helping me get oriented. Coming from the outside, she had insights into the idiosyncrasies of that glorious institution of ours about how it works. I probably would have found out those things, but Barbara did forewarn me about a couple of them. That was very helpful.

Then faculty evaluations, because we were still no tenure. You had to get renewed every three years, and that was a big deal. Then my special assignment was [to] work with Oscar to get this MES off the ground. If you ask me, the one major thing that I feel best about accomplishing at Evergreen, it's probably the work that I did to help get that MES started.

**Fiksdal:** You came at the perfect time. You had gotten disappointed at your previous university, and here was one saying, "We want this."

**Perkins:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** And at a graduate level, which was even better.

**Perkins:** Which I thought was terrific. And we created a core curriculum that every MES student had to take. [laughter] Partly, it was copied from MPA.

**Fiksdal:** I bet there wasn't any English in it.

**Perkins:** And there wasn't any English. The first language of the program was English. You had to be able to write in English. And listen in English.

Have I gone off on some sort of tangent that you don't want me to go off on?

**Fiksdal:** No, this is fine. It's your interview. How long did it take to get that program up and running?

**Perkins:** I arrived in '80. I think we were going to take the first class in '83. That was the era of budget cuts. I think I mentioned in my biographical statement I served six years as a dean. I never once saw a budget increase. Never once. I got so if you asked me to cut the budget two percent, I could do it in about 15 minutes. If you said you had to cut it eight percent, well, it would maybe take a day or so. Ten percent or above, the only thing you do is you start firing faculty and staff. There is no more money to still have a college, except in salaries.

I learned to cut budgets very, very fast, and in one sense, I got a good sense of the importance of the budget to the functioning of an institution. Very valuable lessons, which I had no idea about. Didn't know how they worked. Didn't know where the money went. Didn't even realize the first obvious point, which is most of the money is in salaries. It was an eye-opener to learn.

**Fiksdal:** The Legislature must have been actively cutting money that they gave to the college, because the '80s were terrible. I really remember. We had legislators who wanted to just move us out. Use it for some kind of State offices.

**Perkins:** Yeah. Close the college. It's not worth a damn. If you can't close it, cut its budget. Every State agency was undergoing budget cuts, so we were hardly alone.

I had a term of four years twice renewable. That was the deal I came in with. I thought, well, I'll serve four years, and if I want to go on to other administrative things, I'd better serve a fifth. I volunteered to serve a fifth. That would give me five years as a dean, which was kind of a minimum expectation for other jobs, if I chose to go on.

It must have been Patrick who was Provost in my fifth year. A number of dean substitutes were suggested for me to leave. Patrick didn't like any of them, so he said, "I don't want to appoint any of those people. Would you stay on?"

**Fiksdal:** There was a reason we were hiring from the outside. [laughter]

**Perkins:** Rob Knapp was one of the people Patrick didn't want to hire. Rob would have been a perfectly good replacement.

**Fiksdal:** He had been a dean, or he was. He was a dean when I was a dean.

**Perkins:** He was a dean later. But he ran for, and was one of the contenders for, my job. He would have been perfect. He could have done my job. Patrick, for some reason, didn't like it, so I said, "Okay, Patrick, I'm not going to leave you in the lurch," so I stayed a sixth year.

I think it was Michael Beug that then replaced me. I guess it was Patrick still as Provost? This is where my own sense of what happened when, and where, by who gets quite fuzzy, because I can't really quite remember the years.

**Fiksdal:** That's okay. We can always look at the record. I want to cycle back to my one story of John Perkins as dean. I'm pretty sure it was your first year. You were brand new. Why I was talking to you, I have no idea, since I never usually roamed the halls of the deans. I had a class—I vaguely remember this—in the SEM II building, which may or may not be true, but I remember it was a large room, which I didn't need. But anyway, I got that. You were Space and Budget Dean. Right?

**Perkins:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** I got this room that wasn't amenable, really. I don't know what I was teaching. We got into the room, and it had these terrible little desks with little armrests. It took me back to high school or something. They were unusual. We never had desks like that. There's no place to put your stuff. Things are spilling all over the place. They were easy to move.

I came down and I started complaining about it. "I was in this room and this terrible thing happened. We had these terrible desks." You looked at me and said, "I ordered those desks." I said, "Oh, well, at Evergreen, we like these tables, because then we can move them around. If you look around, there are tables everywhere. But whatever. I know we don't have any money," and I just left.

The next thing that happened was those desks disappeared. [laughter] That was my one story that I thought I'd—I'm sure you don't remember. It was amusing because you hadn't taught there before, so you had no idea how we were teaching, or what we were doing, or what we were used to.

**Perkins:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** I don't know why they had tables at the beginning. They used to be these horrible tables that were really hard to move, but we had them, and that's what we had to have. [laughter]

**Perkins:** I don't remember the story, but I guess you were happier? I hope so.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, I became happier. But I didn't ever have to use those terrible desks again, and that's why I had a high happiness factor.

**Perkins:** Did I order those desks?

**Fiksdal:** That's what you said. That's the story that I remember. Whether it's true or not, John, we have our memories, and that's my memory.

**Perkins:** I will trust your memory on that better than my own.

**Fiksdal:** It's just funny. One of those things.

**Perkins:** I remember during the search process, when I came as a candidate, they put the candidates through a number of different exercises.

**Fiksdal:** Yes.

**Perkins:** One of which I remember very well, which was they gave us a faculty portfolio and I got Richard Jones. I got it day one of the interviews and I was told, "Go read this portfolio tonight, and tomorrow, come back and tell us how you will evaluate Richard Jones." Because faculty evaluation was really key to the—

**Fiksdal:** Was it three years of stuff? Oh, my gawd. Really huge.

**Perkins:** I did go through it. Richard was complaining about something. He was very unhappy about something, and quite irate that somehow the college wasn't doing things right. I remember I came in the next day and said, "I've never done one of these evaluation letters, but here's the way I would start."

I said, "I'll go back on the traditional faculty duties—teaching, research, and service. Richard looks like he's doing really great in teaching. The student evaluations are good. He's upbeat. Very actively involved in thinking about his curriculum. He was still doing some research. This is very commendable for an institution that doesn't has no research requirements, and an atmosphere that even frowned on research. You're not paying attention to your teaching if you're doing research."

I think his complaints were in the service department, and I said, "I'm not sure what do to about the service thing. He's irritated about this. I think I would tell him, 'Richard, if you don't like it, maybe you need to go somewhere else.'"

I wasn't sure how this would go over with the committee, but I guess it went over all right because I thought, well, maybe they wanted to know if I could tell a faculty member, "That's just not the way it can be."

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, that's probably right, because service meant governance. Right?

**Perkins:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** A lot of people didn't do it.

**Perkins:** I think Richard didn't like it.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, well, too bad. We all had to do it.

**Perkins:** Right. I think my advice to the evaluation letter was, “Well, if you really don’t like it that much, maybe this isn’t your place.”

**Fiksdal:** Even though he was a founding faculty member. Whatever, that was great. Very courageous. And you got the job.

**Perkins:** One learns rather quickly never inquire too much about why you were hired if you were hired, because what you’ll find is [that] very seldom is anybody or any group or any committee absolutely unanimous [that] it has to be this one, the only one.

**Fiksdal:** That’s right.

**Perkins:** There’s conflicts always. You really don’t want to know what luck of the draw pulled you out and gave you the job. Furthermore, do you want to know? It wouldn’t do you any good, and you probably shouldn’t know.

**Fiksdal:** Okay, get this. When I ran for dean—this was in 1996 or the year before—Barbara Smith was Provost. I go in for my interview. It was really weird going through interviews. You went to the faculty. I hadn’t interviewed in 100 years. I was hired in ’73 and I didn’t have to do all that, so it was all new to me.

People were asking me these questions, like, “What’s your vision of parttime studies?” The faculty couldn’t decide on a vision, but they could decide we needed a dean, so my vision that it would be Evergreen. Why else would it be? [laughter]

I said these things and I thought, this is just . . . anyway, I was the only candidate. I got up to Barbara’s office for my interview, and she asked a couple questions, and then she says, “You know, Susan, you are the only candidate, but you may not get the job.” [laughter]

That helps you understand our system. You couldn’t count on anything or anyone. You had to always prove yourself. Yeah, I agree, it’s better not to ask.

**Perkins:** It’s better not to ask. You don’t want to know. I felt the same thing when I got the job at Miami of Ohio. Why did they hire me? Sometimes I think it was because the PhD had the name Harvard behind it.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Perkins:** I thought, that’s terrible.

**Fiksdal:** But your other work was interdisciplinary, if they looked at it. All the studies, even though they didn’t get publicized, that was pretty amazing work, and maybe they knew about it.

At Evergreen, what was your first program after you left the deanship? The deanery, I guess I should say. That’s what we usually say.

**Perkins:** It was the most wonderful teaching assignment ever called sabbatical. [laughter] I got a year. Because deans got extra credit for serving as a dean, so I merited a full nine months of salary. I thought, every dean irritates if not infuriates some faculty members. You cannot do the job without stepping on toes or another.

**Fiksdal:** Especially when you're the moneybags and space decider. It can be joyous, but not all the time.

**Perkins:** And some people are not going to like what you did. Remember. I thought, yeah, but faculty don't remember over a year, because after a year, they'll have something new they don't like. So, I will go away for a whole year, and by the time I come back, people will even have forgotten that I was ever a dean.

We went to London, and it was a glorious time to live in London for a year. We had a flat. I had a desk at Imperial College. The London libraries were not particularly good, but I did a lot of interviewing for my research project and went to India during the project.

A year away was great, and then I came back and went immediately into MES. I was supposed to be teaching with Kaye V. Ladd a program I had never taught before, quant methods. I'd taken statistics. There's a world of difference between taking and teaching it.

**Fiksdal:** Absolutely. We all know it.

**Perkins:** Teaching is the only way you ever really learn it. Something happened and I didn't end up teaching with Kaye V., but I did end up teaching somewhere. I did something in MES, I think. At any rate, I didn't teach with Kaye V.

I had always thought MES is really where I'd like to do a lot of my teaching, but I felt obliged to also work in the undergraduate curriculum, and wanted to work in the undergraduate, so I eventually did two core programs for first years and taught upper division several times. But probably more years in MES than anything else.

**Fiksdal:** Were there faculty colleagues that you particularly enjoyed working with?

**Perkins:** I enjoyed working with everyone I taught with. I think I got a pretty complete list. I still haven't thought of anybody else that I was forgetting.

When I went off on sabbatical, I wanted to write a second book, so I started it. It was going to be on the green revolution, the origins of high-yielding agriculture in the US, UK and India. What I realized then—and I really understand it better even more so today—I could not possibly have written that book without teaching with Tom Rainey and Ralph Murphy, and to a certain extent, Jeanne Hahn, but Jeanne I had less teaching with—just a year—and then other people added bits and pieces. But without the history and political economy that I was able to absorb working with Ralph and Tom, I

couldn't have done it. I guess you'd have to say Ralph and Tom were probably the ones that made the biggest difference to my life, but I absolutely enjoyed teaching with everybody.

Ted Whitesell had an effect, too, because he made a study of political ecology as to what it was. That really helped me sort through some things, too.

I enjoyed teaching with Pat Labine because I learned more about agriculture, particularly alternative agriculture, than I would have known otherwise. That was important.

But everybody I taught with we had a good time. I never had a bad team.

**Fiksdal:** I think that you and Pat Labine were both in my very first seminar study. I asked your whole program, all the faculty, if they would let me observe. I think I even recorded it on video. I did use the data later, but I expanded and did little different things later. But I remember that particular program and the really tough issues you were working on, and very unfamiliar to me, what you were talking about. I thought the students did quite well. They were dealing with some really tough reading.

**Perkins:** Yeah, they generally did. They took their reading as seriously as they took their digging in the dirt.

**Fiksdal:** That's a big deal if you can get them to do that. In MES, were you ever the Director?

**Perkins:** Yes, I had two terms, six years, as MES Director. I had the only serious argument with the deans I ever had.

**Fiksdal:** About what? Money?

**Perkins:** Yeah, we were undergoing a budget cut, and I think it was Enrique [Riveros-Schäfer] who was the Provost. He had promised "We will not cut student-faculty ratios." I took him at his word, and then the deans came and snatched an MES faculty away while I was Director, and I steamed over and said, "You promised not to change the student-faculty ratio, and you did. I want the faculty member back." I didn't get it back.

By the time, [Don] Bantz was Provost. Maybe it was Bantz, not Enrique, who was Provost. No, Bantz was a dean. He accused me of insubordination.

**Fiksdal:** Really?

**Perkins:** Which I thought was beyond the pale.

**Fiksdal:** Yes, that's ridiculous as you were a former dean, and then MES Director. Give me a break. All he was was a dean—of course, of Budget and Space, but you knew that job.

**Perkins:** Right. I also understood that the Curriculum Dean's job was really hard, and they probably needed that faculty member, but the least they could have said is, "We're sorry. We're going to go back on our word. We are going to change the student-faculty ratio. That's just tough, but that's the way it's



got to be. We ask your forgiveness, but at least indulgence. We're sorry." If they'd said that, I would have muttered and grumbled a bit and said, "Okay, let's move on."

But they didn't even acknowledge it, so I got hot under the collar. I didn't get hot under the collar very often at Evergreen. That was the one place I felt was egregious.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, and the response was poor. I'm sorry I didn't know that response, because I was a dean at the time, too, I believe.

**Perkins:** Were you?

**Fiksdal:** I remember Don was dean when I . . . I'm trying to think if he was dean. I think I was back helping out in the deans' team. He wasn't dean when I was dean. It was John Cushing. I was helping out, but I was a dean at the time, but maybe one quarter.

**Perkins:** Because the only three deans I remember in the room were Don, Russ Fox, and Jin Darney.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, so that's after me.

**Perkins:** There must have been a fourth, but I can't remember who it was.

**Fiksdal:** I don't remember anything about it, so I wasn't there at the time. I was supposed to do six years, but I just did five. I couldn't take it anymore.

**Perkins:** Because you had three-year terms.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, it was when we had different-numbered years.

**Perkins:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** I think the important deans had four-year terms, and I had a three-year term. But I just couldn't do two of them.

**Perkins:** What I found as being a dean at Evergreen is, in contrast to teaching, the rhythm of tasks through the year tend to repeat itself every year. After you'd been through the rhythm four or five times, you knew what was going to happen; occasional hiccups that were unanticipated, but you knew the rhythm. There wasn't anything new anymore.

**Fiksdal:** That's what bothered me. Then the fact that, I don't know, one day I needed an answer to a question. I looked outside, and then I thought, oh, I'll just take a walk. There were no faculty and I thought, where are they? What's going on?" I said something to someone, and they said, "Susan, it's spring break," or something and I thought, okay, that's it. I'm leaving. This is ridiculous. I can't even remember what the college is about. The college is about teaching and learning, not about me figuring out the answers to these questions. It was really funny.

**Perkins:** It's one reason I—Barbara, I think she spent 12 years as a dean. She took [unintelligible 01:37:37] renewals quite seriously. Because she liked administration work better than teaching, and she was good at it.

**Fiksdal:** She did, and she was someone with a lot of ideas. She was my Provost. She was fabulous. She taught us how to be a dean. She met with us once a week. She took time. She talked to me about being a dean a year before. Made sure I went to this conference. I was set up, but I didn't know I was set up. She did it in such a clever way. I think she wanted to create opportunities for people. She started the faculty exchange with community colleges. She was someone who understood early on that we were becoming way too insular. It's too bad she couldn't have stayed and become President or something, because she really had that vision, I think, for opening up Evergreen to the outside world.

We had a number of conferences when she was Provost, inviting scholars in to talk. For a lot of faculty, who cares about pedagogy? Blah blah blah. But, in fact, that's what put us on the map, and how we had probably half of our students for a really long time. Because forever after, when I was at international conferences—and one time when I was a Fulbright in Hong Kong, we had an international conference, and of course—you meet people who know Evergreen because they're faculty members and they send their kids there. [laughter] Or if they didn't, they know people who did. We were always well known.

**Perkins:** Right. Barbara was a very good administrator, and she liked it. It was a perfect fit for her. The last presidential go-round—I know, it was when George Bridges resigned unexpectedly, I guess, and eventually, Carmichael was appointed. But I was talking to Oscar Soule, and I said, "Oscar, has anybody suggested Barbara Smith step in as President? She knows the college. She'd be very good at it. Maybe you could talk her into doing it for a year or two. I think she's retired and doesn't want it fulltime." Oscar said he was going to pass that on, but I thought Barbara Smith, from my experience, if the President resigned unexpectedly and you suddenly need a President, and you could get Barbara Smith to do it, get her.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, because her experience as a dean—Budget and Curriculum—and then Provost, she knew everything about running a college. But by then, I think she was well retired and had moved away and probably wasn't that interested.

**Perkins:** Have they moved out of Olympia?

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, they built a house.

**Perkins:** Up in Sequim or somewhere up there?

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, somewhere like that. My husband had a pilot's license, so we flew up to see her one time. I can't quite remember but it's close to Port Townsend. She lives somewhere out of the way, a little hard to get to.

What about when you arrived at Evergreen? Were there some odd things that you hadn't expected? You were aware of a lot of experimental colleges. Probably one of the things was the politics. I don't know what else. We had labs, but as a dean, you probably weren't offered a lab. What were some of your first impressions when you arrived at Evergreen?

**Perkins:** One impression I had was, am I prepared for the peculiarities of Evergreen? In one respect, I thought I was, which was I had done team teaching. I thought, of all the things I did in my years at Miami of Ohio, the fact that I did team teaching, and that we were consciously interdisciplinary, meant that I understood something about the dynamics of how the curriculum works.

I had really good colleagues at Miami, but my first teaching colleague, Barbara Whitten—we taught physics and biology—Barbara and I had rough edges we had to get around. We did, but we had different attitudes toward certain things, and we had to learn to meld those and not let them get in the way. I think we did it very well.

So, I understood that you push two people together—three or four or five or six people together—and they've got to work as a team, I knew about rough edges, rough edges that could tear the team apart, and rough edges that people figured out how to get around.

That was the most thankful thing I came in with. For someone to come into Evergreen having never team taught and come in as a dean. Wow. That would be hard. Very hard.

Incidentally, I'd been in touch with Barbara off and on over the years. I went to see her. She eventually moved on and took a job at Colorado College, where she could be a professor of physics. I think that's what she really wanted to be. But we wrote a paper together about a year and a half ago. It drew upon both of our interdisciplinary experiences. She brought a lot of interdisciplinary work to CC from Miami of Ohio, so she changed CC.

We ended up very much still friends. It was nobody's fault, it's just she had her edges, I had mine. They're not the same. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** And you figure that out when you're teaching with someone else. You weren't maybe aware of all of them.

**Perkins:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** You said something interesting. You're retired, but a couple of years ago, you did a paper with your colleague. Are you still doing research?

**Perkins:** Yeah. I'm still writing. I'm writing a book with a former MES student, who I was their thesis [advisor? 01:45:25] in MES. She went off to Delaware. Got her PhD. I was on her thesis committee at Delaware. She's now back teaching in MES, and we're writing a book that deals with energy.

**Fiksdal:** What's her name?

**Perkins:** Kathleen Saul.

**Fiksdal:** That's fabulous.

**Perkins:** Do you know her?

**Fiksdal:** No. I like the story. I got to teach with one of my students who had gotten her PhD. I needed help, and she came in, and Tom Womeldorff allowed us to hire her suddenly, because I was overwhelmed with students. There's something quite exciting about being able to work with a former student.

**Perkins:** Yes, especially when you start realizing, golly, they know stuff that I don't know. [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** They're more recently trained, yeah.

**Perkins:** Right, and that's very good. There are several times I've discovered Kathleen knows a whole bunch of things. I don't know anything about them, but they need to be in our book.

**Fiksdal:** "I didn't teach you that." That's great. What else are you doing in your retirement years besides your research?

**Perkins:** Watching a lot of movies.

**Fiksdal:** Enjoying yourself then.

**Perkins:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** You said before we started that you flew to California near Berkeley, so that's a big thing. And you're closer to your son, which is really important. I'll let you think about all that and see if you want to say more. One of the questions we had is, do you have any advice for Evergreen now? I'll tell you, I ran into Larry Jerry, who is a dean, and he told me that there is a dedicated dean now for the graduate programs. It's the first time ever. That's one good thing that's happened.

As you know, it's super low enrolled, and now you were saying that if the budget has to be cut more than 10 percent, faculty have to go, and faculty have given up their property rights. There's no tenure, and people are getting fired, and people are leaving, and that's not necessarily in a balanced way. I don't know about that, but that's my guess; that they need to ask people who have been there the longest to leave because they're the most expensive. That doesn't mean you've got that expertise in the faculty. There you are, in brief, a little bit that I know.

What do you think we should do to attract more students, or how should the college be changing in order to attract more students?

**Fiksdal:** Let me begin my answer by going back to Miami of Ohio. Miami of Ohio, because of the provost, started this interdisciplinary studies college, which was to be something new and unique in the state of Ohio, and certainly at Miami—very traditional, conventional, stuck-in-the-mud university. This was a new breath of fresh air.

The college entrance board scores of the students we took in were higher than Miami's usual. We started the School of Interdisciplinary Studies, often called the Western College program. Did you know the Western College?

**Fiksdal:** No.

**Perkins:** It was a private school started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, I think, but it was one of the places that became a training ground for Mississippi Summer and the civil rights groups. It became a really hot spot of progressive, radical change in the '60s.

But it also went bankrupt. Couldn't attract enough students. The state of Ohio bought it and gave it to Miami. So, there was this campus, with dormitories, laboratories, faculty offices. A full-brown, four-year, liberal arts campus that suddenly was new stuff that came into Miami. The provost said, "We could turn it into a larger office for the English Department or the Chemistry Department or whatever, but we're not going to do that. We're going to start this School of Interdisciplinary Studies to advance Miami into the world of experimental education and educational reform."

It was a great idea. We were going to grow from six faculty to start with, to eventually 12 faculty, maybe even to 24. Because it had the space. It had all these buildings that we could have filled up.

The Western College program never drew enough students. The budget cutters at Miami said, "Great idea." The faculty that were attracted were highly thought of. We were not considered fly-by-night, Twiddle-Dee-Dee types. But the students just didn't come. Like Evergreen, it was really hard to sell a self-determined major, with a major core curriculum that offered almost no electives for the first two years and required a thesis. Then you got a degree that was self-determined, which you named.

A lot of parents in Ohio [said], "I want them to come out with a major in computer science, so they'll get a job." Or "I want him to come out and have a history degree so they can teach high school. I don't want any of this airy-fairy interdisciplinary whatever goes."

So, Miami ended the program about 10 or 15 years ago. The faculty member who chaired the committee that said you've got to end this thing was one of the biggest supporters of Evergreen, a friend to this day. Somebody from the Philosophy Department.

But they couldn't get the enrollment and they decided it was too expensive to keep. It's not popular. It's not drawing students. They ended it. And I felt very bad. But I thought, well, I left for my own reasons, so apparently, I wasn't loyal enough to stay, and neither did Miami.

Transfer that to Evergreen. Evergreen came out of the enthusiasm of the experimental college movement that partly stemmed out of the free speech movement of Berkeley of don't make me an IBM spindle card, make me a person that's going to come for the education. The University of California started Santa Cruz. Washington State started Evergreen.

Evergreen was the bright, new shining star. Charlie McCann came in. "We're not going to have tenure. We're not going to have departments. We're going to be a college." Then you had Charlie Teske and Merv Cadwallader, the first deans, and they made this place different.

The only requirement to graduate [was] you had to get 180 quarter credit hours, and you called the major what you wanted. Eventually, we got so we made students write a paragraph to say something about what they did.

Evergreen has always had trouble drawing students, and I think for some of the same reasons that the Western College program did. A lot of parents look at it and say, "I want them to have a degree in chemistry. Those people get hired. I want him to be able to get into law school." We know Evergreen students get into law school, partly because they know how to think.

Sometimes I wonder, Evergreen and the Western College program were products of the '60s. They came. They made interdisciplinary studies orthodox in major, conventional universities. To have interdisciplinary work at a conventional university now is not all that unusual.

Was tenure ever reformed? I'm not sure. Teaching was valued more. Even in the research universities there was more of a serious nod given to "You should teach well. Maybe your tenure is going to depend on your research productivity, but you should teach well." The University of California-Berkeley no longer threw away the pamphlets and shooed off the kids who were trying to have free speech on the main plaza of the university.

So, the experimental colleges came, they were a product of their times, and their times may have passed. Maybe that's too bad. But I would say, if Evergreen is to survive, if it's in an existential period again, it's got to figure out how to change with what the times are now if what the times are now don't value what Evergreen created, which was the brilliant invention of a coordinated studies program,

the brilliant invention of breaking down department lines, give faculty the wherewithal, support them if they say, “I’d like to team teach with So-and-So, because then we could really do something interdisciplinary that neither of us can do alone, and we want to do that.”

Now, the times apparently are different. I’m probably as much out of the step of the times as anybody else because I, too, am a product of the ‘60s, intellectually, and maybe those times are over. Maybe Evergreen should die. Maybe experiments aren’t forever. I always felt Evergreen had such brilliant inventions that it could no longer think about anything beyond what it had already done. If I had one complaint about Evergreen, it was the faculty didn’t seem to be all that interested in thinking about something new.

The graduate programs, now there are six or seven of them, I don’t know, there’s a bunch of different master’s degree programs.

**Fiksdal:** Really? I didn’t know that.

**Perkins:** I think most of them are in education and various educational things. Then the Tribal MPA. MES has never branched beyond, but maybe MES should. But if Evergreen faculty can’t figure out, what’s the next experiment, then it’s not an experimental college anymore. And if it can’t draw the students, maybe what it offers is available elsewhere anyhow, so maybe it’s time for it to go away.

That makes me very sad, because then I think, oh, I went as a founding faculty to one thing, and it died. Then I went, not as a founding faculty but a pretty early faculty, and the second and last external dean ever hired—I guess they learned their lessons on me—if that college can’t figure out how to maintain a vitality to give umph to the next whatever is next—and I don’t know what it is; maybe it’s to do something with energy, because the remaking of energy is going to totally remake society, which maybe has to remake the university—if Evergreen can’t do that then close it. The Department of Transportation probably needs extra office space. [laughter] I don’t know. The State government is growing.

**Fiksdal:** That’s a funny choice because they’d have to travel to get there.

**Perkins:** Yes, they would.

**Fiksdal:** But I understand.

**Perkins:** The State government always needs more offices.

**Fiksdal:** They are trying something new. They’re starting this certificate program where you do six weeks of something. You get a certificate, and that’s supposed to help you get a job. Because everyone understands that students do want jobs.

And we have fewer students. There are fewer students going to community college. There are fewer students across the country. They're closing elementary and high schools. There are demographic changes, there are all kinds of changes. Apparently, it's mostly women. Well, we knew that when you and I were there. We had a majority of women students. But more and more students who identify as male [are or aren't? 02:00:40] going to college. There are a whole bunch of issues. I don't know how to respond. But, yeah, interesting point. Our faculty came from experiments that failed.

**Perkins:** If your call to fame is to be an experimenter, once you've done one experiment and you have a product that you like, maybe it's time to do the next. What's that?

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. We have been wedded to our mythological past.

**Perkins:** That's actually the kiss of death of any educational program, conventional or otherwise. If you're wedded to the past, you're going to miss out on the fact that the world changes.

**Fiksdal:** That's right. They were such good times, though. [laughing] We sure enjoyed it.

**Perkins:** Yeah. Colleges and universities, when I came out of graduate school, were expanding so rapidly that if I'd wanted to get a job in a biology faculty, I probably could have. I think I would have been miserable for the rest of my life, but I probably could have gotten a job. By the time I finished my post-doc, the great expansion of universities was pretty much over, in the early '70s. I looked around and I thought, not many jobs available.

I don't know. I don't have the answer to Evergreen's thing. It's just this feeling of if you say you're experimental, you've got to be willing to say one experiment is over, let's do the next. What's next?

**Fiksdal:** I think that's excellent advice, John.

**Perkins:** It would be better advice if I had an idea about, well, here's a new idea.

**Fiksdal:** Here's the idea, yeah.

**Perkins:** The only idea I have is the endless quest for, how do you change the energy systems of the world that I'm currently involved in, so that's all I think about these days.

**Fiksdal:** Right now, that's one of the biggest things that people are thinking about, with Europe trying to put an embargo on Russian oil. It's become not just ecologically important but politically important. I'm glad you're doing the work.

**Perkins:** There actually is an implication for universities because if you're really serious about changing the energy system of anyplace, especially a country like the US, you have to have new kinds of engineers who have new tasks that they don't currently know how to do.



You have to have new kinds of regulators that work for departments of ecology, departments of transportation, departments of labor—any governmental department you want to mention. Department of agriculture. You need new types of regulators and staff.

You need new types of people working in the banking industry, in finance, because the financial flows right now are all going to fossil fuels. That's what banks know how to do. They're not so good at the alternatives.

You need a whole new cast of lawyers because the laws have to change. You need a whole new cast of psychotherapists because this is really going to upset some people, and they're going to be traumatized in their person lives, and they're going to need therapy because they're going to lose jobs. A coal miner who loses their job may also lose their community, their sense of dignity. Those coal miners should lose their jobs. They have to lose their jobs. But you don't throw them away. They're people.

There's just so much that has to change, and maybe Evergreen should become the college of energy transitions to establish a new curriculum on training, or figuring out how a university responds, and do it on a small scale, like Evergreen, so that the big-scale places, like UW, can see what works and what doesn't.

**Fiksdal:** There you go. You came up with a solution. I think the college—I heard a few years back anyway—people were thinking about starting schools of various sorts. School of climate justice, or social justice. I don't know what they all were. But that's a good solution. But then you've got to have faculty who . . .

**Perkins:** . . . want to do it.

**Fiksdal:** And who have at least some imagination. They don't have the training necessarily, but they can create it.

**Perkins:** What the new President of Evergreen should do, whenever—if ever—Evergreen gets a new President, they should be committed to the idea of changing Evergreen. Maybe one thing they would have to do is talk a foundation in the State Legislature into a two-year sabbatical planning period for existing faculty and new hires to study up what they need to study on, and to create the curriculum for the new institution.

So, Evergreen ceases to exist except as a study and planning place. When it reopens its doors, it's got some of its existing faculty, who wanted to make the change, and needed a new life on graduate education to prepare themselves. And it's got a bunch of new faculty who come in enthusiastic to start the new thing.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, we call it a think tank. I'd love to be part of that think tank. It'd be fun. You just think and read research and talk about it. I don't know what they do in a think tank, but that's what I would do.

**Perkins:** Then there's the final exam. "Now, can you create a brand-new college?"

**Fiksdal:** You have to do it.

**Perkins:** Now you've got to do it. "Can you talk the Legislature into funding that?"

**Fiksdal:** Honestly, that planning year, people didn't really agree on much, and they still got started. There's still a mythology that there was a plan, which those of us who were there in the early years know is not true. But there were a number of norms that got started and even more that kept going. We changed a lot over the years.

I was just talking to Earle McNeil. He was hired in the first year, and his first two programs, they announced to the students—because they were always three-quarter programs with seven faculty or something—they said, "You students will receive 48 credits if you stay in the program, whether you do any work or not." I just was saying, really? So, things changed quite a bit over the years.

But that was a lot of faculty in the first couple of years who were doing programs where they made these kinds of announcements to the students, and they were in the covenant as well. From Earle's recollection, students sometimes didn't do too much for a while, but then they usually did. They would step up. I think we all remember those early years. We had some incredible students who had been elsewhere and were so happy to be at Evergreen.

**Perkins:** That's right.

**Fiksdal:** It's still hard to imagine, but when he told me what was in the covenant, I was pretty surprised. So, things have changed over the years.

**Perkins:** They certainly did. We've got graduate programs. We've got parttime studies. We did do certain things. We got things like the Labor Institute. That's gone now, isn't it?

**Fiksdal:** It did disappear, but there are still a couple institutes. I can't name them, but there are a couple. Well, the one that Russ Fox started, [the Center for] Community-Based Learning [and Action]. It's not staffed well, but it's there.

**Perkins:** The educational thing [with? 02:10:36] the community college.

**Fiksdal:** Yes, for the faculty.

**Perkins:** Evergreen could change, but I think when I arrived, I arrived to dire threats of existential survival, that if we did not get the enrollments up, our goose was cooked, and that was that. We did, for a while, make some real progress, partly from graduate students and partly from students.

Today, they're not coming out of the '60s. Evergreen was a magnet for '60s-type students who reveled in the '60s. Those people, that's not today's graduating high school.

**Fiksdal:** That's true.

**Perkins:** The students graduating high school today, their life is different than it was in the 1960s, and they're different. Faculty . . . well, good thing I retired because I was just a kid of the '60s that got caught up in all sorts of things that led me in ways that, believe, Goldwater Republicans didn't go in.

**Fiksdal:** That's just so surprising. [laughter] Good to know.

Thank you, John, this has been really fun. Good to reconnect and talk a bit about your memories of the college and your extraordinary career. Good luck on your book. Do you have the name of your book yet?

**Perkins:** It changes every few weeks, so, no, we don't have a name that we like that's stable yet. The book is about the energy transition, which should really be called "Remaking the Global Society," because the entire globe depends upon fossil fuels, and that has to change, which means almost everything is going to be jostled or destroyed. Nothing will escape.

**Fiksdal:** I wouldn't have quite understood the points you're making except for this war in Ukraine, because we're reading so much about how the global economy actually works. I certainly didn't know. But with Covid, and then this war, certainly I think our world has really changed.

If I read you correctly, there's an opportunity here. Things have to change. But often, something changes, and we have to respond to it, and usually, most humans are quite creative at those moments, so let's hope. I'm glad you're at the forefront of thinking about that.

**Perkins:** I hope I'm at the forefront.

**Fiksdal:** It sounds like you are. [laughter]

02:14:11

**Perkins:** Before you go, when I pushed "stop recording"—I read Tony Zaragoza's thing—the thing that really sticks in my mind is after you stop recording, don't don't don't, under any circumstances for any reason in any way whatsoever, do anything to turn your computer off.

**Fiksdal:** Yes, please don't. Instead, look for that file. I just did a quick search on my computer—it's not a MAC but it's not hard to find because something pops up usually—but you will have a file named ZOOM with this date on it. Once you have that . . .

**Perkins:** . . . I'll send it to you, I guess.

**Fiksdal:** You can. You can send it to me. That's probably the easiest. Why don't you do that? And then I'll send it to the people that need to have it. We have an official transcriber, and once she has

transcribed this interview, I'll listen to it and go over and edit it. It's not very much work to do that because I could hear you all the time, so that was good, and I know who you were talking about, and you said last names a lot, so that should be fine. Then I send it to you and then you look at my edited version. You don't have the audio, but you certainly won't need it, because she is actually a professional. All your words will be there unless she's misunderstood a word.

What you then do is you get to delete parts that you don't want in there, if there's anything. You can put brackets and add to what you were saying, if it's unclear, or if you wanted to add more information. You can even put in footnotes if you want.

But what we do ask is that you let it go as an oral document. You will find that you don't always speak in sentences, for example.

**Perkins:** That's really true, I'm sure.

**Fiksdal:** And you'll find that sometimes we overlap each other, and that's okay. Try not to worry too much about that. Just fix it up in other ways without trying to make it grammatically correct sentences.

**Perkins:** Okay. Two of the things you sent me, I think one was I'm supposed to give you permission to do all these things?

**Fiksdal:** I do need the consent form. Did I send you Sam Schrage's address? You could just sign the consent form and send it to him.

**Perkins:** I don't think I have Sam's address.

**Fiksdal:** I'll send it to you. I think that would be the quickest. Just put a stamp on it and send it.

**Perkins:** Okay.

**Fiksdal:** He needs that consent form.

**Perkins:** Then there was a form that if there was something I wanted withheld?

**Fiksdal:** Once you get the transcript—I doubt there's anything because you didn't say anything that I heard that was at all controversial. But if there is, you may want to use that form.

**Perkins:** There were a couple of things that I know I would hesitate to let go out to any wider public, but I didn't say any of those things.

02:17:59

[Discussion continued but was not transcribed]

02:18:33

**Perkins:** One of the things I remember Byron saying, and I'd been a dean long enough, he said, "The problem with administration is you end up knowing things about people you really didn't want to know."

**Fiksdal:** Exactly.

**Perkins:** I thought, that is so true. It happens with anybody in a supervisory-type job. One of the things that always amused me about Evergreen was that some faculty members were surprised when they learned that deans did have supervisory duties and powers. [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** Yes, it was a “pretend” surprise, I’m sure.

**Perkins:** I had at least one colleague in the deanship who came into the deanship and was surprised when he exercised supervisory power that faculty reacted negatively. [laughter] I told him, “You’re a dean. You have to do these things. You just stepped on a toe, and chances are very good they’ll get over it. In the meantime, they’re pissed, and they tell you.”

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, you tell people off. That’s just the way it is.

**Perkins:** Most of us have been both the pisser and the pissee, and most of us do get over it and realize, well, that’s just life.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, people were just doing their jobs as best they knew how at the time. Sometimes you think, I could have done better, but on the other hand, who knows?

**Perkins:** Every one of us could have done better at certain things. Every one of us did some things that we really shouldn’t have done. Every one of us avoided doing something that we should have done. And every one of us did some things that were darn right.

**Fiksdal:** There you go. And we’re happy about it.

**Perkins:** And we’re very happy about it. You can’t be a dean or a provost or a president or a boss without that inevitable flack that comes with the job. You just can’t do it.

**Fiksdal:** That’s a good point.

**Perkins:** So, you’re going to turn this into the great oral history of Evergreen. Right?

**Fiksdal:** Sam is working hard trying to get us all to interview people. We’re getting close to having interviewed those people that we could. I was really happy to interview Charlie Teske before he died. That was a big deal. He really had a very sharp mind until the very end. Very articulate.

02:21:40

[Stopped transcribing]

02:23:18

**Perkins:** I’m really glad that you’re doing it [oral histories] because whatever Evergreen’s problems have been over the years, and whether it survives or not in the future, it was a significant event. A state set up an institution.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, we’re a state college. That’s a big deal.

**Perkins:** That's a very big deal. And there were big inventions made at Evergreen. We tried them. We made them work. Maybe in the long run, it didn't create a viable institution like the UW and others of the regional universities, but Evergreen was—like Santa Cruz, like Green Bay, like New College—a significant venture, and its history should be recorded.

**Fiksdal:** We were influencers. That's actually a job title these days, but we did. We influenced education and educational practices.

**Perkins:** Evergreen influenced the Western College program of Miami very strongly. It wasn't until I got to Evergreen [that] I recognized, oh, my gosh, Evergreen intruded into the setup of Western, with one exception. The Provost said, "You will give grades."

**Fiksdal:** That would be less work.

**Perkins:** It was less work, but a narrative evaluation was one step way too far for Miami.

**Fiksdal:** It's too bad. It's a terrific system, I think, especially the self-evaluation. But it really was a lot of work, besides everything else that we were doing.

**Perkins:** But it was one of the most important parts of the experiment.

**Fiksdal:** Exactly, and the faculty self-evaluation, I think, was also crucial.

**Perkins:** Yes, it was, and I think Evergreen solved a problem we didn't talk about, which was, how do you have a tenure system that doesn't result in dead wood? The kiss of death for a lot of tenured faculty is they take their yellowed lecture notes and they go teach the same course they've taught year after year. Nobody cares what they're doing. They never have to justify anything.

Evergreen made a tenure system which had evaluations, which, if you were inclined to slide into dead wood territory, your colleagues would jostle you out of it. I think that in itself deserves more publicity maybe than anything else we did. Certainly, it's right up there among the top. I hope Sam brings it home.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. He'll read this, so he'll be glad that you said something.

**Perkins:** By the way, my first two books were based extensively on oral interviews of scientists and other people.

**Fiksdal:** Maybe you should tell us the titles just in case.

**Perkins:** *Insects, Experts, and the Insecticide Crisis*. 1982. I interviewed entomologists and I wrote a history of what happened when the American entomological profession went to war with each other. They had a civil war. It got really nasty.

**Fiksdal:** That's exciting.

**Perkins:** The entomologists got all hot and bothered. Nobody else in the world did, I can assure you.  
[laughter]

The second is called *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution: Wheat, Genes, and the Cold War*, which is a study of, why did the Green Revolution, which was a system of high-yielding agriculture, get started? How did it get started? Who paid for it and why? To find out the answer to why you have to go back to Harry Truman and his point four program and his 1948 inauguration. It was because we had a cold war to win. That's why we got high-yielding—

**Fiksdal:** That's better than the [MPR? 02:28:08] programs I've heard about.

**Perkins:** By the way, do you know *American Experience* on PBS?

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, I don't really watch it. I should?

**Perkins:** There's one you should watch.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, that you were on. I watched that one. I remember you let us know and I watched it. For the record, do you remember the date or the year or anything?

**Perkins:** I can get it for you.

**Fiksdal:** I think we should add it in. Look it up and let me know and I'll put it into the transcript.

**Perkins:** Okay.

**Fiksdal:** I do remember that I watched that.

**Perkins:** It was partly because I knew Norman Borlaug. I'd interviewed him. I did have a theory that—I'll be brave enough to say I think it's a novel theory. There's one other guy who came pretty close, but I think I came closer.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Perkins:** He probably thinks he came closer, too.

**Fiksdal:** Nah, you did.

**Perkins:** But I'm a real fan of the importance of oral history because there's some stuff that people never write down, so you can't go read it in an archive. They'll never publish it. You can't read it in a book, but it was really influential. Like, you know one of the major causes of the war among entomologists?

**Fiksdal:** Of course, I don't know. [laughing]

**Perkins:** It was metaphysics. The war it was over whether eradication of insect pests was morally okay. I had one interview who said, "No, it is not okay. We do not have the permission to destroy one of God's creatures."

**Fiksdal:** I thought it had more to do with ecological balance. You have different people in every discipline.

**Perkins:** Yes. There was one guy who confessed to a metaphysical belief in God and the creation that I'm sure other entomologists ever would have admitted to, but kind of believed.

**Fiksdal:** Interesting.

**Perkins:** That's why you go for balance. The pests have their role in creation just like the good insects. But one guy spilled the beans. He knew what it was all about. God and metaphysics.

**Fiksdal:** Wow. That's very interesting.

**Perkins:** You've got to assume things about nature. Oh, but you wouldn't want to tell your colleagues that you learned the basics of your science in church. [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, that's a little scary. But anyway, you wrote about it, so people know.

**Perkins:** I wrote about it. If you read *Insects, Experts, and the Insecticide Crisis*, you'll even [unintelligible 02:31:30] referred to.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, it'll be more interesting, because I know already one of the major topics.

**Perkins:** Right. If you ever read that book, Susan, you let me know. [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** Will do.

**Perkins:** I think it's one of those books that, oh, my goodness, who is ever going to read this thing?

**Fiksdal:** I've written two books also, John. I don't expect that you've read them.

**Perkins:** I haven't.

**Fiksdal:** But they're fascinating, and full of novel ideas.

**Perkins:** They are, and the author knows why it's so exciting.

**Fiksdal:** That's right.

**Perkins:** It's the only thing that keeps you going. The royalties probably haven't made you—

**Fiksdal:** No, that doesn't do it. We've got to turn it into a murder mystery.

**Perkins:** Right. Add a sex scandal to the murder mystery and you'll make a living.

**Fiksdal:** Let's get started. [laughter]

**Perkins:** Right. I'm going to stop this. Does that cut us off?

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. When you push your button, it stops the recording.