Jean Mandeberg

Interviewed by Nancy Koppelman

The Evergreen State College oral history project

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FINAL

Koppelman: I am sitting here with Jean Mandeberg again on August 26, 2021, for our second interview for the Evergreen Oral History Project. Jean, in our first talk, we talked a whole lot about your life story, the trajectory that brought you to Evergreen, what your teaching experience was like at the college, many highlights of what it was like to be a colleague. Today, we're going to talk about broader institutional issues, which figure a great deal in your background because you, as a devoted classroom teacher, were also devoted to the institution with a spirit of what Rudy Martin liked to call stewardship, and you really exemplified that. One of the things that you wrote in your little bio was that you served on multiple hiring DTFs, which you thought were the most important and also the hardest committee assignments. I was hoping you'd talk about that a little bit.

Mandeberg: I'd be happy to. I don't know this for certain, but I think the first time I was asked to serve on the hiring DTF was because I represented the youngest person on the faculty. Everyone else had experience from other institutions—so, both teaching and hiring and having relationships with colleagues—and Evergreen was my first teaching job. Not only was I learning in the classroom in my interdisciplinary programs, but I was learning around the table in the DTF meetings.

Hiring wasn't ever explained to me as the most important committee at the college, but I came to think of it as the most important committee at the college because it really was building a teaching community—it was building our colleagues—and because I thought the decisions were so incredibly hard to make.

People worked at it very diligently. Read files. Did interviews. Met people. Entertained visitors. We asked people to jump through hoops and we jumped through hoops. What was baffling to me was we would all bring our notes to a meeting, and I would watch the hiring DTF meeting turn on a dime, change from one person to another, and not for some really good reason. It had to do with the dynamic in the room, who had spoken last, who spoke first, who was more impassioned than another that day, who happened to not be at that meeting. Just for reasons like that, it felt like we could make a decision.

Koppelman: Was that one thing that made it so hard?

Mandeberg: Yeah, for me anyway, because it felt almost like we should make a decision and then sleep on it and come back and revisit the decision in order to be sure about all of these extraneous things it seemed to be about. Of course, nobody had enough time to do that.

Koppelman: If you had been running the zoo and it wasn't all those extraneous things that was motivating the conversation and decision, what do you think should have been?

Mandeberg: I think, for example, early on, there was always a student and a staff person represented on the hiring DTF, with an understanding that students and staff brought perspective and context to hiring that was really important for faculty to understand. My memory is that in my later service on the hiring DTF, staff or students were not present in the same way. Maybe there was a halfhearted effort, but it was too complicated. We needed to get things done quickly. Let's just do it. We faculty know best anyway. It was that kind of an attitude.

To have to move more quickly was too bad. I wish there had been more discussion about the psychology of hiring, about the ways that we read people. We went through a period where there were a lot of questions about disciplinary expertise and a lot of emphasis on that, so there were subcommittees from specialty areas and all that kind of stuff, when, in fact, ultimately it feels to me like what we didn't pay enough attention to was people's ability to collaborate and get along well with others. That all of us, no matter what disciplinary expertise we came with, we just had to learn a lot, and we had to figure out how to teach with other people. No matter how smart some people were, if they weren't able to work with other people, it was a disaster.

Koppelman: Do you remember times—you don't have to name any names—when that happened, when someone got hired for the wrong reasons and then it turned out they couldn't really collaborate?

Mandeberg: Yes, absolutely.

Koppelman: What do you attribute that to, that discipline? It seems counterintuitive that at an interdisciplinary alternative college that people would be so concerned about the wrong [blank 00:06:44].

Mandeberg: The problem was that we couldn't really assess that spirit of collaboration. There certainly were people who were personable, and we had lots of conversations, I remember, about knowing in the first five minutes, what kind of handshake do they have? How did they relate to the room? How well-prepared are they? Have they researched this college? Is it this place that they want to come to? All those kinds of things.

But there were some intangibles that we didn't look at closely enough. I don't know whether it's about the psychology of hiring, or the psychology of collaboration and interdisciplinary work. I think

people understood interdisciplinary because we would ask for their dream program and they would come up with fabulous ideas for dream programs.

But in terms of responding to students, changing your mind, working with people you don't agree with, being able to really listen, learn and change your mind—we expect students to do that—I don't think we had a good assessment of that.

One thing I should add that always stuck with me on the hiring DTF is that after I was hired, I was told that Phil Harding, who was on my hiring committee, participated in privately indicating his support for me that made all the difference in my ultimately being hired. The argument was, not surprisingly, "She doesn't know how to teach. She hasn't ever taught before." Phil said, "But she's the one with potential. Hire her. She will come here and grow into this job," which is exactly what happened.

I so deeply appreciated the influence that that had on my life that when I was on the hiring DTF, that's what I was looking for was potential. Not surprisingly, that's what I looked for in the classroom also. In some way, that's what we're all looking for, and it's that magic . . . I don't know what . . . the veil that we're trying to pull back to see what could be.

Certainly, in hiring, that was part of it, and what was always astonishing to me was that no matter the potential—I was telling somebody this the other night—there was a candidate I remember who was very talented and came to the hiring committee's interview dressed inappropriately. One of the ways it was inappropriate was that he had on loafers and no socks. For Olympia, for Evergreen, I've got to tell you, after he left the room, that's what people talked about. "What happened to his socks? Why isn't he wearing socks? Who wears loafers with no socks in Olympia? That's ridiculous! He'll never survive here 10 minutes." It was like, "Folks! Folks! Move off the body! What are you doing?" Again, it's a weird committee in the way it can get stuck.

Koppelman: I think this is a really interesting subject because in departments, it works completely differently. There's a chair. You're hiring only people from your discipline. Disciplines are divided up into different fields, and so you're only hiring for that field, so it's really narrow. At Evergreen, it's not so narrow. I've wondered for years what people on hiring committees are bringing with them that they miss maybe from traditional higher ed. There's this uneasy thing of, yeah, we've been teaching here for however many years, but in a certain way, you never know exactly what you're doing. If you're doing a lively job of it, you're always reinventing.

Mandeberg: Right.

Koppelman: So, looking for someone who can invent, so you don't know what they're going to do. You don't know if they understand what you're talking about. It's the strangest place to hire.

Mandeberg: It is. And I would hope that now, the hiring DTF begins with some more honest conversations about what each person around the table brings to the conversation, some self-reflection and some self-examination about what their perspective is, so that we put all of that out there and everybody understands better their blind spots, what their strengths actually are in the conversation.

Koppelman: Here's a question. You've no doubt been on hiring committees for artists, maybe more than other fields? Not necessarily?

Mandeberg: Not necessarily.

Koppelman: Even so, you've had the experience of hiring in your field and the experience of hiring far outside your field probably. In the committees you were on that were in your field, did you feel that people ought to look to you for some guidance and understanding that they wouldn't get from one another? Likewise, when you were on committees where it wasn't your field, did you feel not exactly deferential, but just go into it with some humility? I don't really understand this field fully so I'm going to trust certain things that my colleagues think that maybe I don't fully get.

Mandeberg: Yes, certainly, but not a lot. Just enough. There certainly are certain things in the visual arts that I would be happy to explain to my colleagues but were important about translation of visual ideas into written and spoken language.

Koppelman: This is not so much about you, but just a piece of advice you might have to give about, what kind of guidelines do you think people on a hiring DTF might benefit from having at the beginning? What should they be thinking about, not just in terms of the nutts and bolts of any hire, but this business of fields? You're on a hiring committee for a physicist because you might teach with one.

Mandeberg: That's right.

Koppelman: But it's the physicists who know whether the candidates know what they're talking about, have a good way of approaching their own field, speak the same language and all that. What kind of guidelines do you think would be good to have? Do you have any thoughts about that? If you don't, it's perfectly okay. I know it's an out-of-the-blue question.

Mandeberg: I'm not sure I have any particular guidelines. I'm not sure I could speak to that very well right now. I did increasingly, and I do now, think, for a lot of obvious issues around racial justice, that we all just have very deep-seated assumptions about hiring. Those aren't closely examined enough, or they weren't closely examined enough.

I remember the early conversations about, well, if you're a white person, you're more likely to look for white people and hire those white people. I remember thinking, okay, yeah, fine. But not like, oh-h-h, so that means who do we exclude? Who's missing? What aren't we seeing? Who aren't we talking to? Not just in a way that we'd go through the motions, but in a way that would really address deep-seated, longstanding blind spots and wrongs.

I don't think that we really addressed that deeply enough, and I guess that's the guideline I would start with is how to really do some sort of self-examination and reflection of the people around the table, of the current hiring strategies, and how they reflect what's going on in the culture. Who's being trained? Who's applying? All of those kinds of things.

Koppelman: It sounds like you think it might be good to have guidelines, but you're not exactly sure what they ought to be.

Mandeberg: Exactly.

Koppelman: But that's an important little bit of advice from you. You also talked about serving as convener of Expressive Arts and chair of the Visual Arts, and I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that. Because in a question-authority college, it's always strange to be in a leadership position.

Mandeberg: I wonder if I could talk about that a little bit. I think leadership in those roles was something I gravitated towards because I tend to be very organized and want to get things done, and I'm good at problem solving.

Yes, I was convener, and I was head of the Visual Arts. Lisa Sweet and I were co-heads of the Visual Arts at some point. I would call meetings. I could set agendas. The frustration was in getting my colleagues to attend those meetings. The fact was that I'd say, "If we make decisions, and they're decisions that would affect your life, don't come back to me afterwards bitching and moaning if you don't show up at this meeting and weigh in. Just ahead of time, that's what's involved here."

Koppelman: Do you think that fostered better attendance?

Mandeberg: I don't think so. I like to think that what fostered better attendance was everybody knowing that if I was setting the agenda and running the meeting, we'd start on time, we'd get out on time, and we'd get something done, and that I had a very limited tolerance for bullshit.

For example, there were meetings I wasn't convening or leading in the Visual Arts at that time, but I remember after Paul Sparks retired, he kept coming to Visual Arts meetings. I remember turning to my colleagues and saying, "This is unacceptable. He has done nothing but stir conflict and derail us for such a long time. It's been so frustrating, and so many people have talked about it. Now that that

particular personality conflict should be done, he's still here!" Everybody said, "Well, you know, he'll figure it out." I said, "He won't figure it out."

I was the one who went up to him and said, "Paul, thank you so much for your service to the college. You need to stop coming to these meetings." I remember, he looked at me like I had lost my mind. I said, "You're retired. We have work to do. We have a different stake in the college now than you do, and we simply can't move on while you're still at the table. I know it sounds harsh, but please don't come to meetings anymore." And he didn't, which was a huge relief. I know there were colleagues who were angry at me and felt that I had insulted him. I just thought, too bad. I've had it with years of putting up with him and finding strategies.

I guess that's the other thing about leading the Visual Arts is that I developed strategies. For example, very consciously saying most of the time, "Paul, that's a very interesting point. I will put that in the minutes, but we don't have time to talk about that now." Just anything to let him know that he'd been heard, but we were not going to spend time on what he wanted to spend time on.

For the most part, in the Visual Arts there were colleagues I could rely on, colleagues who did what they said they were going to do, and people who were wonderful to teach with. Expressive Arts was for the Visual Arts, and for a long time, very frustrating. It wasn't a happy marriage, I think. It was much more productive in the Visual Arts when we started meeting separately from the Expressive Arts. I've got to say that when we decided to do that, oh, my gawd. People were very upset. People in the Expressive Arts thought that we were breaking away, some rogue nation going off and doing our own thing. I just thought, that's completely silly. We just had things we needed to talk to each other about separately from the Expressive Arts.

It was one of any number of tensions that existed in the college, and my attitude was always, those tensions are part of what enriches our lives, so don't try and get rid of them, just live with them. Figure out how to deal with it.

The Expressive Arts was, "Are you with us? Are you against us?" "This is not about that. We'll come back. We just need a little alone time. We'll be back." [laughter] And we did.

Koppelman: You still met with the Expressive Arts.

Mandeberg: We navigated that. Personalities were very complicated. The first time I ever asked something of the whole Expressive Arts as a convener, and then one person out of the 20 people in the room did what I had asked in anticipation of the next meeting, I realized I just needed to adjust my expectations about what these people would do.

I appreciated the times early on when the deans would serve as matchmakers and arm-twisters in making the curriculum because I felt, as head of the Visual Arts and as convener, I only had limited authority. But I do remember absolutely when I said to Bob Haft and Hiro Kawasaki, "Have you ever thought about teaching together? Here's what the curriculum looks like. Would you two please talk to each other?" They're dear friends now. They taught together multiple times.

I know that from a dean's perspective and from a convener's perspective, you can look at the players and just imagine different combinations. They didn't always listen to me about those ideas, but they would listen to the deans. I always wished that the deans would do more of that. I could call meetings. I could set agendas. I got tired of dealing with budget stuff. I wished there was more dreaming of, "Suppose we did this?" "Suppose we did that?" "How do we do this?" That kind of stuff.

I think my leadership roles in the Visual Arts and in the Expressive Arts gave me a perspective on the arts in general at the college that was surprising to me. I saw—from College Advancement, from the deans, from lots of colleagues and from lots of alums—that the arts were what drew people to the college in the first place; what helped them stay sane once they were at the college; that the arts were a lively fundamental part of the soul of this college.

And yet, I was told that Charlie McCann—I never talked to Charlie about this but I was told—that he didn't value the arts as a part of the liberal arts curriculum. He put up with us. He wasn't going to stand in the way, but he really didn't get it. I remember thinking at the time, he's the President of the college. What are you talking about?

There were other moments where I remember thinking, the arts are making this place pulse. Whether it's writing or performance or whatever, there were weaknesses. There were weaknesses in the performing arts especially. But there were other elements of the arts that I thought were so crucial to the spirit of the college, the spunk, the imagination, the alternative in alternative education that it was baffling to me that more administrators didn't just say, "We've got to do what we can for the arts."

Koppelman: I think that you're putting your finger on something so important about the relationship between Evergreen, as an alternative, liberal arts college with all its quirks, and what students experience in high school. We don't all have high school-direct people, but even those who aren't directs come from high schools at some point. For many students, it's the arts in high school that's the saving grace. It's their favorite class, whatever it is. They do everything else but it's that class that really makes a difference. At Evergreen, there's the potential anyway to pick up that thread that is so common, I think, for students in general, but especially for outside-the-box kinds of students.

Mandeberg: You're absolutely right. I remember one year that I taught Form and Function, which was this sculpture program that I taught by myself, and there was a student who came from a science background and weaseled his way into the program. He was one of those students who just showed up and said, "I must take this program." I said, "You don't have any of the prerequisites. Convince me." And he did, and he stayed, and it was fabulous. Just fabulous. I don't think he did any other art programs after that, but it was one of those moments where this is what he needed.

Koppelman: And he knew it.

Mandeberg: That's right, and the program structure was adaptable enough that we could incorporate him into a program like that.

I started to do governance work at the City and the State because after I was head of Visual Arts and then convened the Expressive Arts, there wasn't really a place for me to go unless I wanted to be a dean. I didn't think I wanted to be a dean, for a bunch of reasons, but I thought I had some administrative skills. That meant going outside the college.

Also, I had seen Richard Cellarius do work with the Sierra Club and admired that, and thought, when he goes to his Sierra Club meetings, he's introduced as a faculty from The Evergreen State College. That means something. That's really important. When I sit around the table at these State Arts Commission meetings, and I was introduced as the faculty at Evergreen, people would come up to me afterwards and say, "I've heard of Evergreen. What's going on there now? What do you teach? What's it like there?" Then they would go back to their institutions.

So, I knew it would make a difference. I knew that I could exercise some administrative chops in a different way and just take on different challenges outside the college. And it was helpful for me to go outside the college to get some clarity on what the hell was going on inside the college.

I worked on the Olympia Arts Commission and chaired the City's Art Commission. I was on the Washington State Arts Commission and then chaired that commission. Then I was on a committee to redesign the Fourth Avenue Bridge and served with all these people in the community and heard public testimony and was railed at by people who thought we were making the wrong decisions about a bridge. Things like that. But it really was expanding and wonderful to do that.

Part of the result of that was I started thinking about the relationships of Evergreen to the larger community in Olympia. It still feels like to me not enough people speak to that and spend time on that. Jess and Hannah Spielholz were beloved members of our community early on that served as these ambassadors. We had that for a while, and Friends of the Library, and Friends of the Gallery. Then

bridges were burned. There's no question about that. You can blame it on Joe Olander or whoever, but that was really clear. The female President of Evergreen . . .hallelujah.

Koppelman: Jane Jervis.

Mandeberg: Jane Jervis and I had long conversations about community engagement, and she and I dreamed up this fundraising campaign to support the gallery. There's no museum in Olympia. There's never going to be a museum in Olympia. At that point, there wasn't a gallery at SPSCC or at Saint Martin's, and so Jane and I went out and met with the banks, and other people in town, and raised $70,000.

We came back and said, "This is a nest egg for a gallery. There's support in the community for this. Now we need to hire a curator, we need to build a new space, and we need to let folks in the community know about the exhibits." We had these ideas of big exhibits, half would be at the college and half would be downtown, so people wouldn't have to go back and forth. All these kinds of ideas. Ultimately, there was a new gallery built at Evergreen.

Koppelman: And it's a beautiful gallery.

Mandeberg: It is. It's a stunning gallery.

Koppelman: I think it's great.

Mandeberg: But the liveliest gallery program in town right now is at SPSCC.

Koppelman: I know.

Mandeberg: It's great to have a lively gallery—and it pains me every time that the announcements that I get, are not announcements from Evergreen.

Koppelman: Mm-hm.

Mandeberg: I think that I was able to do some administrative work at the college, transfer that to administrative work outside the college, but projects that I dreamed up that built on Evergreen community relations just never took off. The gallery is sputtering along.

I wrote about a Literary and Book Art Center that I dreamed up, and Steven Hendricks and I talked. Steven and Miranda and I would have conversations about ways to develop an MFA in creative writing, and then house it in this literary and book art center. They'd invite Jamie Heinricher to move in. There's Pope Press. It was like, okay, we've identified something that's percolating in Olympia—writing, bookmaking, papermaking, an appreciation for text.

Koppelman: Printing.

Mandeberg: Yes, let's cultivate that.

Koppelman: Yeah, and now—I know from my sister—there's this whole print loft studio place downtown at that knitting factory building, which I didn't know anything about till she told me. So, you see a lot of potential in community.

Mandeberg: I do. I still see potential.

Koppelman: Right.

Mandeberg: I still see potential, and opportunities and I wonder about Evergreen's ability to act on that. I get that some are worth it, and some aren't, for a whole bunch of reasons—that we can afford some things and we can't afford others. The timing is important. Talking to certain administrators. All stars need to line up.

Koppelman: Yeah, but there's one star without which no stars line up, and that's somebody who's willing to step outside of their own self-interest and say, "I see potential, and I want to make this happen."

Before, you said something about realizing you don't want to be a dean, but you have these administrative skills. But what I see, and as you talk about it, it's not just that you have the skills but that you really like using them. It feels good to you to use them, and you want to use them, and you like to make things happen. Something you enjoy. I was thinking about, as an artist—and I see you in your studio—you're laughing—that you have a bunch of materials, and there's a design challenge built into the pile of materials. You don't know how they're going to come together, so I wonder if there's some analogy there for you.

Mandeberg: I think that's a very interesting way to put it. When I first was talking to Miranda and Steven, and sitting around this living room, actually, with deans and faculty, talking about a literary and book art center, somebody—maybe it was Bob Leverich—had the idea for a program having a design assignment, where the students would identify potential sites downtown, and work up designs for what this Evergreen center should look like.

Then we had an exhibition of the different design proposals. People in the President's office came, the Deans' Office came. This was really going back to the students and the curriculum to say, "Let's use this as a design mechanism." But that idea of actually building something was really fundamental to it.

I think building the gallery was like that. I wanted walls. I wanted audio/visual systems. I wanted lights. I think that was also the pleasure of building the new Woodshop—well, it's not so new anymore. There used to be a woodshop in the basement of the library, and students in the visual arts who wanted to make anything out of wood would have to go to the Library Building into the basement,

where there was no natural light, no windows, bad ventilation, and they were out of sight of everybody doing their work.

Actually, that's a really good question. I don't know what had to align in order to free up that space. I think it's that the printshop wanted that space, and we needed things printed. Then somebody said, "Then where can we put the Woodshop?"

Koppelman: Yeah, yeah.

Mandeberg: So, our pleading to move the Woodshop made no difference, but this other sequence did. I served with Walter Niemiec and Doug Hitch and Jon Collier, the college architect, to design this new wood and metal shop. We had a blast. It was just so much fun because none of us had ever built anything like that before. It was what you're describing. We all really valued brick-and-mortar something, and there it was. Here was our chance.

Koppelman: I remember watching it go up and watching when the tables went in. When the tables went in, and you could imagine the lines of students sitting at the tables. But then, the really amazing thing was when the student work started showing up the first year in those little gallery spaces outside. It was just amazing.

Mandeberg: Yes.

Koppelman: I watched all that happen from afar, but it was a really beautiful thing to watch. I just can't emphasize enough how much more I'm hearing you say is that it wasn't in your job description to take these things on, but it is in your description as an artist that you were looking for materials to work on. The materials don't have to be handkerchiefs and buttons, it can be a community and a space and a relationship, and you had the hunger to do that.

Mandeberg: That's true.

Koppelman: I think without that, none of the other ingredients will work, just like without the artist, the pile of materials is just a pile of materials.

Mandeberg: I so clearly remember students coming to me and saying, "I don't know anything about metalworking, but I've got to use something other than a keyboard. I really want to learn about tools. I don't exactly know what that means, but people have always used tools. You, Jean, know something about tools. Teach me about tools." [laughter] It was kind of like that.

When the chance came to redesign the Fine Metals Studio, that was, of course, complicated, as everything is. We worked through blueprints and opportunities and possibilities, and laid it out, and had the prison system make all these metalsmithing benches. Everything is safer now and has better ventilation. It is a truly remarkable Fine Metals Studio.

I'm very proud of all the facilities that we have at Evergreen. I guess related to the lack of support for the arts generally, I have, on more than one occasion, said to administrators, especially people in the Marketing and Advancement Office, "You realize there are students who would come to Evergreen just to use these facilities? Our facilities have tools that people don't have at home, that you can't collect, that communities are closing in their civic centers. But we have those tools and students will come here for that. Then once they come here, you say, 'While you're here, let's study this, and let's combine it with this, and have you ever thought about this? You're good at this.' But you get them in the door."

Koppelman: With something that you really have.

Mandeberg: That's right! Absolutely—that you really have that are graduate-level studios. They're absolutely beautiful.

So, yes, I think that part of the current state of the college actually is that there are these brick-and-mortar constructions. There is a Wood and Metal Shop, there is a Gallery, there is a Fine Metals Studio, there is a Printmaking Studio. These are all studios that, I don't think it's an exaggeration to say, are extraordinary. They're well equipped. They've been well run. They're safe. The printmaking is non-toxic. They're amazing, and I don't think that enough people know about them. It's like they're our secret.

I wonder about how that translates to other parts of the college in terms of what we think is okay to present and what we don't think is necessary to present to an outside audience. I don't know, but when you ask about the current state of the college, I assume, like my colleagues, it makes me sad to think about the college shrinking right now, the enrollment being down.

And what I often say to people who are currently teaching at the college is, "I taught there for 30-some years where I can't remember a year where we didn't worry about enrollment, where enrollment wasn't a big issue."

Some of it was the type of students. Some of it was where the students are coming from. Some of it was the number of students. It was different things all the time. But what always saved us was that we really taught from our own curiosities. We taught from our own research. We taught from our own experience about what in our fields we thought was valuable to frame for students. And we tried to listen to what students were interested in and what was important to them.

I never understood the marketing impetus to package us in some more traditional way. I get it, but I don't think it's useful.

Koppelman: What that does in part is it keeps things secret that shouldn't be secret.

Mandeberg: I think it does, which is something you're pointing out there, I think. I remember early on, Mark Levensky asked me to speak at a faculty meeting. I don't remember how this happened, but I think it came out of my service on a hiring DTF. I'm not sure.

I remember Mark asked me. I was absolutely terrified. I never spoke at faculty meetings. I got up and talked about the importance of the campus and faculty tolerance for people who don't fit in anywhere else. Early on, it was students had been to three other colleges and then they came to Evergreen. Some of it's that, but some of it is just from teaching all these years—and you know this, too—there are students who just don't fit cleanly in other places.

I had a student in art studio who needed to work under a table, on the floor, the first week because she was just too afraid. I get that. There were students who were so afraid in seminar, and the first week, I always talk about how in my seminar at the University of Michigan in my freshman year, I never spoke, I was so afraid. I get it.

But not just students. Faculty also. Mike Collier, for example, was a staff person at Evergreen early on who just was the oddest, quirkiest, most brilliant guy. He just was like many people who I met early on at Evergreen who valued this as a place to be. Partly as an artist, and partly just temperamentally, I thought, yeah, this is my tribe. There are people who are a little weird, who don't fit in.

It's the reason I taught Different Drummers. It's the reason I taught Weird and Wondrous. It's the reason I'm teaching at Evergreen, because there are people attracted here who think there's something they can say they can't say someplace else. There's something they can explore that they couldn't at some other department.

Koppelman: I think you're pointing out a fundamental attractiveness of the college to a lot of people, which is that fitting in is not a value.

Mandeberg: Right.

Koppelman: This also gets at the current state of the college intention stuff, because I think there is a perception that's promoted in some circles that there is a narrowing of what is and isn't permitted. But it's not just at Evergreen, it's a stereotype of a liberal education now in general.

Mandeberg: I think that's right.

Koppelman: But I think it's a stereotype. I don't think it's true, because I get all of this feedback from students still. "I love this place. I can say whatever I really think." From veterans and older people, and young people who homeschooled all their lives. Across the spectrum. They see the narrow point of view, and it's expressed, but there isn't some feeling of being oppressed by it.

Mandeberg: Right. I often, for example, would talk to Jane Jervis about a gallery being a visual arts study center. There's one way to think about a gallery that has to do with marketing and showing things off, sort of a narrow perspective. But I think a gallery can also be a very lively, alternative, unpredictable space.

Koppelman: And big museums do have spaces like that for the public.

Mandeberg: That's right.

Koppelman: I still think we could be that space for Olympia.

Mandeberg: Mm-hm.

Koppelman: Try this on for size. You know about Evergreen having stewardship of that Coach House building downtown. Have you been to that building?

Mandeberg: Yes, a number of times.

Koppelman: It's beautiful. How do you think we might use that building? Because it's just sitting there. But it's a huge building with a full kitchen. The whole upstairs could be a gallery.

Mandeberg: That's right.

Koppelman: I just wonder if you have any ideas about that? One of the reasons I'm asking is because I'm periodically sending bits of wisdom from the Archives [blank 00:47:12 through 00:47:15] because people do have great ideas, so I'm doing a little curation there.

Mandeberg: One of the opportunities that we talked about over the years in Visual Arts was an artist-in-residence program. It relates to hiring. Like how do we get new artists and ideas into the college without committing for an entire career? We talked about the idea of having an artist-in-residence where someone would come and live in Olympia, have a place that they worked. Students could come and work with them for short periods of time. There would be an expectation of an exhibition, a public lecture, whatever was appropriate for that person, and then they would leave.

But there wasn't ever really a place for it. It may be that the Coach House would be a great place for that. I haven't been upstairs in the main building. Do we have the Coach House and the main building, or just the Coach House?

Koppelman: I'm not sure.

Mandeberg: In the main building, there are rooms upstairs that were formerly bedrooms.

Koppelman: Right. I think that we do have the main building, actually.

Mandeberg: It's the sort of building where there's a kitchen, there's bedrooms upstairs.

Koppelman: You could live there.

Mandeberg: Right. You could have more than one artist having a residency in that building.

Koppelman: Yeah.

Mandeberg: But something like that would involve some flexibility. To unstick some things, that would involve some flexibility. I know that the arts have shrunk through retirements and that we're not in a position right now to add fulltime arts faculty, but then temporary arts faculty are an attractive possibility.

Koppelman: That's a fantastic idea.

Mandeberg: That's the kind of thing that would help morale.

Koppelman: Definitely. I'm going to pass this idea on to John Carmichael, with your permission.

Mandeberg: Great. I'd love it.

Koppelman: I'll figure out who the visual arts people are, so he knows that they know.

Mandeberg: Yeah, that's a good idea. When I started applying for residencies a million years ago, there were maybe six—four—solid residencies. Now, residency is almost synonymous with tourism in the arts.

Koppelman: Right.

Mandeberg: There's lots of versions of residencies. It means that there's lots of artists out there looking for cool places to be. It means that if we establish something like that, we could define it however we wanted to. The number of expectations has changed a lot. It could be pretty cool.

Koppelman: It would be very cool.

Mandeberg: I remain interested, in terms of the current state of the college, in two things that I want to put on the record. One is collaboration somehow with SPSCC and Saint Martin's. It just seems unfortunate to not take advantage of higher ed in this town, not to have more connections between those three institutions. I don't know what they exactly should be, but I think that that would help each of us, all of us. I still think that it's a shame that there isn't some physical presence of Evergreen downtown.

Koppelman: More than the Coach House could be? More in the center of town?

Mandeberg: I mean in the center of town downtown. When Steven Hendricks and I taught Narrative Objects, we had just a fabulous student.

Koppelman: You had an exhibition in the library. That was an amazing exhibit. So, you had a fabulous student.

Mandeberg: We had a great program. There were lots of wonderful students in that class, and it was a terrific program. There was one student in particular from Chicago who wasn't ever going to be an artist. Maybe a writer, not a visual artist. He was just sharp and responsive and responsible and fun and

lively. At the end of the year, he said, "I'm leaving Evergreen." I thought, "No, no! Don't do it!" He said he needs to go to a place that's a college where there's also a town where he can shop and go to the movies and go to performances and walk around. He didn't feel like, as an Evergreen student living on campus, that he was invited or drawn downtown.

There were a number of comments from people about how you could drive through downtown Olympia and not know that Evergreen existed, let alone that there were three colleges, although now there's evidence of SPSCC and Saint Martin's downtown.

I don't know what it should be, but I wish there was an Evergreen presence downtown. I think it's partly public relations and partly helping students who live way out in the woods on campus know that we are here.

Koppelman: What kind of presence do you envision?

Mandeberg: My grand scheme is that it should still be a literary and book arts center that's linked to our commitment to Writing Across the Curriculum; that writing is just fundamental. This is one of the things we teach. Writing and reading.

Koppelman: Could you imagine, for instance, maybe one program a quarter meeting downtown? That kind of thing?

Mandeberg: Absolutely. I think that the Longhouse would like to keep the letterpress on campus. I think that's selfish, and I think the letterpress is hidden in the basement of the library.

Koppelman: It is. And it shouldn't be because it's such a beautiful thing to see, and especially when it's going. It's like a magic trick.

Mandeberg: That's right. What Steven and I had talked about is designing and building a literary and book arts center, where people are actively using the letterpress. There's big glass windows, and people downtown are walking by saying, "This is what Evergreen people do?" And there are other people next to them on a computer using In Design, and of course, we do that, too. But I agree with you. I think the letterpress is an incredibly beautiful process.

I think that this is an acknowledgment that students need and want to express themselves. Whether that's writing or image making or a combination, I think that that continues to be, and I can't imagine it's going to change, so providing another outlet for students to make things, I think that a literary and book arts center would complement what's going on at Arbutus, all of the classes that they have around crafts and materials and materiality and making things.

Koppelman: Can you imagine collaboration with Arbutus, or is it too—

Mandeberg: Yes, and with the Hands on Children's Museum.

Koppelman: Yeah.

Mandeberg: I think paper, writing, printing, bookmaking, you can make that as complicated and esoteric or as straightforward as you want. That's why it adapts so easily. But when the rabbi at Temple Beth Hatfiloh was taking his sabbatical and he wanted to do a book arts class, he either went to Tacoma or Port Townsend because he couldn't do that in Olympia.

Of course he should be able to do that in Olympia, given all of the representations of writers and book artists and printers here, it just doesn't make sense to me that he shouldn't be able to do that in Olympia where he lives and works.

There is a new project right now to have the old Armory up on the Eastside become an arts center. I don't know whether there's potential for Evergreen in that project, but the Armory is huge.

Koppelman: Yes, it is.

Mandeberg: And the Armory is still owned by the National Guard. It's just now, thanks to the Legislature, going to shift ownership to the City of Olympia. We are just starting a visioning process.

Koppelman: Are you part of that right now?

Mandeberg: No, deliberately.

Koppelman: Seeing it on the sidelines.

Mandeberg: Right. I'm hearing about it as a member of the Olympia Arts Space Alliance Board, and we look out for artists' studio space and workspace and live/workspace. There's a possibility certainly for studio spaces in the Armory project. But, with my little Evergreen hat on still, I was sitting in a meeting the other day and thinking, well, maybe there could be a role for Evergreen in this building. If there's going to be a book arts studio in that building, who's going to provide the type? Who's going to provide the presses? Where's all that going to come from?

I used to pooh-pooh the idea of a plaque over the door saying, "The Evergreen State College Literary Center." I don't pooh-pooh that so much anymore.

Koppelman: That's how you have a presence. If your stuff is there, you've got to announce yourself.

Mandeberg: That's right. When I was on the committee to redesign the Fourth Avenue Bridge, at the end of this long process, the City called and said, "We're putting a bronze plaque on the bridge and we want to make sure of the spelling of your name." I said, "That's completely ridiculous. Bronze plaque? Give me a break." They said, "No, no, it's really going to happen."

Okay, fast forward. Now people walk across that bridge and read my name and then they call me, and they say, "I saw your name on the bridge. What's that about? When did you do that?" And I think, yeah, it's not so bad to have names in public places.

Koppelman: Right.

Mandeberg: I guess another idea is I wonder what's in store for the Armory project. It's just starting. If Evergreen wants to be in on it, this is the moment to step up.

Koppelman: Given your working across the different parts of the college, as you're talking about it, I'm trying to envision, okay, so there isn't Jean Mandeberg at Evergreen anymore. Where would such a person come from? Because there's got to be someone either at the college or someone who would get hired, but given the budget, we have too many faculty, not enough students, which means that there's room for people to do other things. That's why, I guess, Jen, when she was the Provost, started these faculty fellow programs. Do you know about that?

Mandeberg: No.

Koppelman: Faculty getting halftime release from teaching to do cool administrative development things. For example, there was a faculty fellow at the Washington Center who was supposed to be helping to promote better teaching, and a faculty fellow for first-year experience. A lot of it is very inward facing, but what you're describing is work that's outward facing. I just wonder if there's a way for these faculty fellowships to be outward facing. Because we do have too many faculty, and they're on the payroll, and they're going to keep being on the payroll.

Mandeberg: And they could do other things.

Koppelman: They could do other things.

Mandeberg: I think that's a great idea, and it absolutely could be outward facing.

Koppelman: Making connections, really.

Mandeberg: That's right, making connections and then it's like doing reconnaissance work and bringing information back to the community about all kinds of things that are percolating. There's a lot changing right now in the arts downtown. Commercial real estate is changing. People are both emptying out and coming back to live in Olympia. There's all of these apartments being built in downtown Olympia, and there's a lot of people moving into those apartments. They're a younger population. I wonder about—what did we used to call it?—not Evening and Weekend Studies, it was before.

Koppelman: Parttime studies?

Mandeberg: It was something before that, even before that. But the idea being that there would be people in town who wanted to take a blahbadeblah class or something, a ceramics class. I wonder about faculty addressing this new, I think somewhat younger, population in downtown Olympia that might want to continue learning.

Koppelman: A kind of re-envisioning. I think I know what you're talking about. You're talking about continuing education.

Mandeberg: Yes. It's an old idea but there's a new population for it.

Koppelman: Actually, it was what [Alexander] Mieklejohn did after he retired, and even before he retired in Michigan, that's what he did when the alternative college closed. He started wanting to provide education to laborers in the area, because there were so many. When he retired, he moved to the Berkeley area, and he ran this continuing education no-credit thing for just adult learners.

Mandeberg: Right!

Koppelman: For years, like two decades, I think.

Mandeberg: Really? That's exactly the kind of thing I'm talking about. I was just reading in the *New York Times* yesterday about the—what did they call it? People who were leaving their jobs, the newly resigned or something like that. People who are shifting jobs, leaving jobs, reimagining their lives, their careers. It's one of those liminal moments, right?

Koppelman: It is.

Mandeberg: It just seems like it's filled with potential.

Koppelman: It is filled with potential. It is.

Mandeberg: Especially around education.

Koppelman: Yeah. Obviously, your oral history will make a contribution to the Archives, but some of the ideas that you're expressing may actually make a contribution to the near future of the college, because I want to share what you've said.

Mandeberg: Good, I would like for you to do that.

Koppelman: Really great ideas. One of the reasons why it's important to share them is because there's 40 years of experience behind these ideas. They're not coming out of nowhere, so that's really helpful.

Mandeberg: It's coming out of experience of 40 years, and I certainly still care about the college.

Koppelman: Of course.

Mandeberg: I also just care about the community where I've made my life.

Koppelman: Right.

Mandeberg: I realize that communities take care and feeding and cultivating. It's not just that I want my students to have a place that they want to come to live in for four years. I want to have a community that I love living in.

Koppelman: And we want the new faculty and staff who come to the college to want to be here.

Mandeberg: Yes, exactly. I still go to Seattle, and I go to Portland, and I go to Port Townsend, and all those places, and I will continue to do that. But my understanding is that the newly resigned—I think that was the name of them—are saying, especially given the weirdness of Covid, what kind of life do we want for however many years we're going to be able to live it? That's a very important question.

Koppelman: It is.

Mandeberg: How can Evergreen contribute to that I think is worth asking. And not just around arts, obviously, but other things also.

Koppelman: The newly resigned.

Mandeberg: I think that was the word in the *New York Times*. I had heard all these employers were unable to fill jobs.

Koppelman: Especially in the service industry, waiters and waitresses.

Mandeberg: This article talked about, well, if you pay them more and treat people better, you wouldn't be having such a hard time.

Koppelman: That's right.

Mandeberg: And those employers who really are paying attention and paying people what they're worth and giving people opportunities and all those kinds of things, it makes sense. Duh.

Koppelman: Yeah, it does.

Mandeberg: I do think it is an interesting moment in Olympia. Let me just say there's two other things. One is there's something called the Creative District that's being defined and built right now downtown. It's a way, through the State Legislature, to attract money and grants and marketing and identification of related businesses—art studios, performing arts center—with Armory, things like that. I think that that's worth paying attention to.

There's a design for an arts and history museum downtown.

Koppelman: Really?

Mandeberg: Yeah.

Koppelman: I didn't know anything about this.

Mandeberg: In the old fire station that was a childcare center for a while.

Koppelman: I know this now what you mean.

Mandeberg: That building is now empty, and we hope that the City will give it, for a nominal fee, to this group of historians and artists that have been meeting for a couple of years to figure out how to build and arts and history museum.

Koppelman: Wow.

Mandeberg: I don't know whether it will have studios. OAA's [Olympia Artspace Alliance] interest was in the upstairs being studios for a while. But at the very least, it has artists and historians talking to each other about how, well, we don't want some funky art center, we don't want some dusty history center. Okay, let's get that out of the way.

Koppelman: What do we want?

Mandeberg: That's right. And how can we address what would attract a contemporary audience in downtown Olympia? Because they really do want to know about what downtown used to look like, and what worked and what didn't work, and climate change and how all that's going to affect what the arts and history continue to look like in Olympia.

Koppelman: Here's a question for you. Politically, Washington State is way ahead of the curve on a whole bunch of things, as we well know, particularly around Covid, around climate, things like that. An incredible number of Evergreen graduates work for the State at all different levels. That's from top to bottom. Every year, there are legislative interns from all over the state that come from colleges, and they're usually disproportionately represented by Evergreen students.

Mandeberg: Huh.

Koppelman: One reason why is because Evergreen students are really ready for that kind of thing. One of the things that was in Evergreen's founding principles was, we're in the State Capitol, and so the college should have some real, solid, ongoing connection with the Capitol, meaning with the political life of the State.

But what you're describing is another way to think about the life of the State, the political life of the State, and connecting the arts to what the State is. I wonder if there's a way to think about what you're just describing now. I didn't know about this design for an arts and history museum.

What I'm seeing emerge is there are concentric circles of what a community is. There's your house all the way to the state, or the country, of course. But if we just think about the biggest circle being the State of Washington, the fact that we're a State school, I'm just wondering if it's a moment to bring back that original aim of the college to have that kind of connection, which is one place where the graduate programs came from, to serve the State in a real, practical, direct way. But there's so much more that could be done.

Mandeberg: Right. You remind me that Karen Fraser is Chair of the Board of Trustees; that there are offices like the State Arts Commission that are deliberately in Olympia, not in Seattle.

Koppelman: It came to me when you were talking about all those issues, and about the climate change issue in particular. I'm thinking about where that firehouse is. It's right near where the sea level is going to rise.

Mandeberg: That's right.

Koppelman: There's just a lot of potential in Olympia, because we're the State Capitol, to be a living example of the things that we need to understand better.

Mandeberg: Yeah, I think you're absolutely right. That's a very important connection to make back to this process. Yeah, cool.

Koppelman: The only topic on my list that we haven't talked about yet, I think, is—we talked about the current state of the college. I don't remember if before we turned on the recording if I mentioned 2017 to you. But a lot of faculty in their interviews have talked about it, so I thought I would just ask you about it—if you have anything to say about it, if you have any advice for the college about how to appropriate the narrative in some way that's out there that's likely to continue in one form or another. Just any thoughts about that. I don't mean to put you on the spot, so if you don't, that's fine.

Mandeberg: In fact, I wish I had thoughts about it. I have a certain amount of guilt that I don't have thoughts about it, because I know how hard and just how incredibly difficult that year was on so many of my colleagues. In fact, after I retired in 2015, I spent much of 2016 and '17 away from Olympia.

Koppelman: I remember you took this long road trip.

Mandeberg: We took this months-long road trip and visited former students and friends and colleagues and family all over the country. Then we went to Europe for a long [time]. It was my time to get out of town, so I feel like I wasn't paying attention. I know generally what happened, but I don't know enough specifically about what happened, so I don't have anything to add, I think.

Koppelman: You saw *The Chair* just last night. That's what happened. Some version of that is what happened.

Mandeberg: I think that that's right. I live with a mediator, so I've thought about how to manage differences of opinion when everybody is at each other's throats. I know that it's not just an ombudsman. It's partly that, but it's some spirit of reconciliation and mediation and conversation that's present in the community in Olympia, but it doesn't seem to make it out to Evergreen in the way that it could perhaps.

There's certainly nothing but differences of opinion moving forward, as best as I can tell, in the country, let alone at Evergreen, so figuring out how to navigate that, and which conversations are worth

having because you really feel like there's some potential there, and which just are never going to—Paul Sparks is just who he is. I just needed him to leave.

Koppelman: In order to do your work.

Mandeberg: That's right.

Koppelman: You were still working.

Mandeberg: We planned a program about craftsmanship. I knew when I needed to say to Bob, "You do yours. I'll do mine. You do Tuesdays. I'll do Thursdays, and we'll be fine." Other times when it was like [claps her hands] "Let's get into it. Let's both come Wednesdays. We'll roll our sleeves up and do what we're going to do."

I guess knowing how to pick your battles. Knowing what really is worth arguing about and pushing for and what isn't.

Koppelman: It's interesting because the way you framed the challenge gives agency to the people in the institution to frame, in some way, what needs to happen and make decisions. I think there's been this feeling, especially since '17—but before that, too—that stuff is kind of coming at you, so what you're managing is stuff that's coming at you that you're not making decisions about, that you have to deal with because you just have to. The consequences of your decisions don't so much have to do with what makes for a good education. It has to do with damage control and things like that.

Mandeberg: Yeah, and I remember the deans often over the years being in that reactive mode, and they'd come to the Visual Arts or the Expressive Arts and say, "Oh, my gawd! Oh, my gawd! Oh, my gawd! What are we going to do about this?"

I do remember meetings with Sally Cloninger. Sally Cloninger and I were there in one meeting in particular. It was like, "You have to pick this! You have to do this!" I remember we both were in a mood that day, and we just sat listening, and we said, "Yeah, no, we're not doing that." Whoever was convening said, "No, no. The deans have said we have to do this, and we have to do it today. It's really important." Sally and I said, "No, there's no reason we have to do this. It doesn't contribute to our students' education or our well-being as faculty." The other thing we said was, "And frankly, what you're asking us to do today is boring. For all those reasons, we just today say no."

We didn't do that very often. But it does feel like there's a moment. There should be more moments where we just—people are tired. People are angry. People are scared. People are uncertain. I understand all of that, and I think you need to factor that in to how much you can do, and you want to do, so pick the really important stuff. More than ever.

Koppelman: It's time for everybody to read *The Plague* together, I think.

Mandeberg: Yeah, I think that's right.

Koppelman: To just reflect on what you just said—tired, scared, angry, uncertain. It's a scary future that's facing us. How are we going to live in this?

Mandeberg: Right, and what role could Evergreen have in that? If we can't do everything, what are the important things?

Koppelman: Yeah, given the truth of our reality.

Mandeberg: Exactly. Let's face it, and let's be leaders. Back to leadership.

Koppelman: Yeah, that's exactly what I think, too.

Mandeberg: And I do think that that's possible.

Koppelman: You've just given a boatload of wisdom here, Jean. [laughter] Like I said, we've really come to the end of my list, but are there other things you want to put on the record that we haven't covered yet? Or any final thoughts?

Mandeberg: No, just what a pleasure it is to be asked to do this, how important it feels to me. More and more, I feel, like as a middle-aged or old white woman, my role is to get out of the way and be quiet. I appreciate being asked to speak because I do think, in some ways, my way of speaking right now is through my artwork. That's where my energy is going.

In committee meetings—and I'm on several boards—my role is really to ask questions and to help especially artists of color or BIPOC colleagues do what they want to do. So, I appreciate being asked so I can talk for a while, because I don't get to do that very much anymore, appropriately, importantly. Thank you.

Koppelman: Thank you, Jean.