

**Charlie Teske**  
**Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
**Interview 3, November 8, 2016**  
**FINAL**

**Begin Part 1 of 3 of Charlie Teske on 11-8-16**

**Fiksdal:** Okay, we are beginning our third interview with Charlie Teske.

**Teske:** Well, as we left things the last time, I had walked into an evening cocktail party on the evening before my day of interviews. And that day of interviews was the last day before the official vacation for the Evergreen staff that were on board.

And, of course, there was a three-hour difference from my time in Ohio, so it was only 7:30 when David Barry, the Provost and Academic Vice President, took me to the President's mansion. And I looked at Charlie McCann and I said, "I know you."

And he looked at me and said, "I know you."

All right, how did we know each other? As I was able to piece it together afterwards—I don't think we ever sat down and compared years—Charlie had graduated from Yale right at the end of World War II. He had been in the Naval Reserve Officer's Training Corps, so he put in at least a couple years of his required hitch as an ensign. Then, when he got out of that, he put in at least a year in, I believe, it was an executive training program for people who were going to be doing things like managing department stores and so forth.

And Charlie decided he didn't like it, and so he enrolled in Yale University Graduate School in the Department of English. Okay. I started there in the fall of 1954. One of my four courses—three seminars, and then a course in Old English—one of my four courses was called "Age of Wordsworth," and in the fall, we studied Walter Scott, Coleridge and Wordsworth; and in the spring, we studied Byron, Shelley and Keats. Romantic poetry. I think there were about 25 people in the class, and there was an auditor; an older student who had taken his coursework, but was getting ready—it must have been the January holding of the oral exams that he was preparing for.

Just a word about the oral exams. At the time that I entered Yale, there was a mandatory year-long course in Old English, so that was exempted from the oral exams. But starting with Chaucer, and other medieval poets, you could be asked questions about any British, or American, or Irish writing in English author from 1350 or something like that to the present time.

The exam was only an hour long. That doesn't seem like much, but if your answers are just yes, no, for facts or something, you can cram an amazing number of questions into that hour. Now, another thing that sounds superficially good: You would have a panel of five examiners, and then the Director of Studies would serve as a kind of referee. The examiners were all teachers in the English Department, but they did not examine you in their fields. So, for example, the questions that were asked of me about Chaucer were asked by Cleanth Brooks, who was a 20th century literary criticism person. It was the man who had taught me Tudor/Stuart drama—Shakespeare and contemporaries—who asked me the questions about Romantic poetry.

That seems great, you know. You're not supposed to know as much as a specialist knows, but just what somebody in general as an English teacher should know. The problem is all of these people had side vocations, pet hobbyhorses, in the areas. And they figured if that wasn't their specialty, but they knew it, that you better know it, too. And there's some very fascinating stories about what goes on in those oral exams.

At any rate, apparently Charlie McCann either had not taken a course in Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, or he had taken it only as an undergraduate. So he felt he needed to get that sharpened up for the oral exam, so he had been given permission to audit it.

Charlie was very reticent—and, of course, he was, by that time, considerably older than the rest of the people in the class. And, as you know, Susan, age differential means less and less as you go along. But still, when you're starting a graduate study, and there's somebody there who's—I think Charlie's six or seven years older than I—there was a difference.

But at any rate, I recall a couple instances where some of us went out for coffee after the seminar, and he went along and was sitting at the table. And I recall one instance—and I can see that clearly, clearly—of our standing out on the broad sidewalk in front of the gate at the Hall of Graduate Studies for about 20 minutes chatting about something.

And, of course, another thing, he and Barbara were living off campus in an apartment, so I did not see him--the rest of us—most of us—were eating, sleeping, playing ping-pong and going to class all in the same building. Charlie was coming there only for classes, so I did not meet him otherwise.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, right.

**Teske:** So I had not seen him since, I guess, January of '55 would have been the last time. And so here it was 1969, December, and I walked in. As I've told people, other than Charlie's own family, I had made his acquaintance earlier than anybody else at Evergreen. So that was an interesting evening.

The next day, I had a series of interviews. Dave Barry had interviewed me back in O'Hare Airport

to see if I would be suitable, and if I was at all interested. So his time with me that morning was about dollars and cents, the exact parameters of hiring; and how TIAA-CREF was going to cut in, and things like that. But there were two things that happened that day that I think—you asked about sort of the flavor, the feeling, of the school at that time. I met with McCann from 10:30 until about quarter of 12:00. And at one point as we were talking, it became clear to me [laughing] that they were not talking to me as a consultant. They were talking to me as a candidate for deanship of Humanities and Arts.

He said, “Okay, you’re from Oberlin with a big conservatory. If you would join us, what would you do about music?”

I said, “Well, I can tell you what I wouldn’t do. I would not, first of all, have anything like a professional school of music. Even though Evergreen was planned to grow to 12,000, UW would never allow us to do that, and I wouldn’t want to do what that implies.” I said, “I would not limit things to notated Western music between 1685 and 1913. I would be willing to have all kinds of music, so long as it was good.”

“Fine. How would you start?”

“I would start with a big band—a stage band, a jazz big band, or whatever you want to call it.”

“Why?”

“First off, it couples the need for tight ensemble playing of notation, and thinking as a group and getting those values, with taking your turn playing improvised solos. It has both things in it.”

And at that time, in the ‘70s, you’re crossing generational lines. “The people who grew up with Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Stan Kenton and so forth will just love this. But almost all community colleges and other four-year schools have jazz bands, so this would fit right in. And also”—and I gave Charlie the lecture—“America is not producing string players, but it is producing wind players, and this is some of the most exciting wind music,” and so forth.

“Okay, well, that sounds . . . who would you get to lead that?”

I said, “I would want somebody who himself or herself is a practicing jazz musician, who would earn the respect of other jazz musicians around the place, but who has a big interest and experience in classical music—in chamber music, and, if possible, in music theater.”

“Okay, do you anybody like that?”

I said, “Not right now, but I know exactly where to find them.” And I was thinking about North Texas State, Long Beach State, Indiana Jazz Workshop and so forth.

McCann said, “Okay, if you join us, that’s what we’ll do.”

Well, Susan, I had been writing position papers [laughing] for the Oberlin Conservatory year after

year. And my point was, “Look, you’re training your people to sing in the Metropolitan Opera, play in the New York Philharmonic, and do piano recitals in Town Hall. But most of them are going to earn at least a large part of their livelihood as music teachers, and to have somebody pretend to be a music teacher who does not know about the way that the rest of world has done most of it’s music as long as there have been human beings, that’s just simply wrong.” And 10 years, I’d been writing those. Hadn’t moved an inch.

**Fiksdal:** And one talk with Charlie McCann . . .

**Teske:** And here, I’d come out, one talk with Charlie McCann, who “Okay, if you join us, here’s what we’ll do.”

Now, I insert here, about 20 years later when we’re celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and having a party, I reminded Charlie of that talk. And he said, “Well, you know . . . “

And I said, “I felt I didn’t have to hold anything back. I got a job. You know? You say you’re serious about something different? Okay, here you go.”

He said, “I did the same thing. When I came over from Central”—where he was Dean of Faculty —“to be interviewed by the Trustees of Evergreen,” he thought, “I’m not going to hold back. They want to know what I think, I’m going to let them know.” And he said, “I let it all hang out; and I got back in the car feeling good, and I drove back to Ellensburg. And when I got there, and Barbara said, ‘Well, how did it go?’ [laughing] I said, ‘Well, I told them what I thought. They’re not going to touch me.’”

A couple hours later, the phone rang with the offer. I checked with Rudy Martin. Same thing at his main interview. He had all sorts of prospects. “Are you serious? Are you really serious when you say you want to do thus-and-such?” So Evergreen has the habit of calling people’s bluffs.

The other interesting thing that happened that day, here I was teaching in Ohio, just south of Lake Erie, at a time when Lake Erie was so polluted that even the lake perch, you could get a few from quite a distance away. Right after I left there, the area was so polluted that the Cuyahoga River caught fire. I had grown up in a place where one truck came over from Fulton Fish Market in New York every morning, and another came up from the Philadelphia docks. I was used to fresh seafood, and there was precious little—you had to exert yourself around north central Ohio to get great seafood.

Barry had been extolling the virtues of the Olympia Oyster House, and he had promised, when I was out for the interviews, he would take me to the Oyster House. Well, he picked me from McCann’s office, what he called “Slaughterhouse Four”(where the budgets were cut)—the one permanent building on the campus, which now is Daycare. That was the one permanent building; the rest were all office trailers and prefabs.

And I noticed Dave was a little bit antsy, and I said, “What’s the problem?”

He said, “Well, I know I promised you to take you down to the Oyster House, but this is the last day, and staff are having a potluck lunch, and I really feel I ought to go. But if you want to hold me to going to the Oyster House, we’ll go.”

I said, “No, no, no. No, Dave, I’ll go with you to the luncheon.”

And I did, and I was exposed to my first experience of Evergreen-ness.

### **End of Part 1 of 3 of Charlie Teske on 11-8-16**

### **Begin Part 2 of 3 of Charlie Teske on 11-8-16**

**Teske:** And after the potluck was over—which was very good, by the way; I mean, people were sort of showing off—and, you see, Susan—this might be important to mention—when I arrived, there were already three staffs here. There was the Financial Staff, and they had their own trailer—pretty much led by Ken Winkley, and working under Dean Clabaugh—because, if you’re going to set up a college, and you’re going to set up funding, you have to do that in advance. You don’t just walk in the day the doors open and say, “Here we are. Give us money. Okay?” So the financial systems had to be all set up, and preparing for the necessary funds. That’s number one.

Number two, Facilities. Those buildings, at least the Library and the Lecture Halls and the dorms, had to be ready in our first year. And so you had to have not only Jerry Schillinger and his engineers, but we had three staff architects, so that when the clients for the buildings came on board, the drill would be that—okay, so when I became client for what became the Communications Lab, my architect was Bill Phipps. So I would sit down with Bill and start drawing flowcharts. “I want this to connect with that, and I want to make sure we have a thus-and-such, and so on. And we’re going to do what’s called sea-level flooring, so that in 110, 117 and the recital hall, you can just roll the pianos and other equipment in; you don’t have to lift them onto a stage. And I want the doors in that one corner, the audience left of the stage of the recital hall, the door here in 117, the choral room, and the door here, 110, the orchestra ensemble, I want them all to be large enough so you can move a piano right in.” Things like that.

I would tell him, “So here’s what we want to have happen,” and just sketch flowchart. “Thus-and-such has to be connected with the so-and-so. Okay? How are you going to insulate the recital hall from the experimental theater? You put those green rooms and a corridor in between, and those will be your ready rooms for the respective theaters, and give you a big, long, wide space in between, so it’s easier to keep the sound”—you know, things like that.

Then Bill would take that to the outside professional architect hired by the architectural firm, and Bill would translate that into architect-speech. And that guy would then do the actual design, send it

back to Bill, who would sit down with me and explain. I forget who the third guy was. Let's see, Norm Johnson was one of ours—at any rate, there was an architect working with Mervyn Cadwallader, another with Don and another with me to design . . .

**Fiksdal:** . . . the Library Building?

**Teske:** The Library was already designed. Okay? Because that was a huge hole in the ground when I came. A very, very large hole in the ground.

**Fiksdal:** And that was what year that you arrived?

**Teske:** I arrived in '69, right before Christmas. That was my date. So one of the things—okay, the third group—Finance was one. Construction was two. Library—because you do not just snap your fingers when the school opens and have 90,000 or 100,000 volumes—so the Library staff, including Malcolm Stilson, had to be there before.

So the Library already had a fairly large prefab office building. At that time, the Facilities was located in a mobile home, and Finance was located in an office trailer. And then the Vice Presidents and President had their office, in what had before been a regional meatpacking place, and then now is the Daycare Center. Okay.

So after the luncheon, I was exposed for the first time to a Malcolm Stilson musical comedy.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, he did it that soon?