Magda Costantino

Interviewed by Marla Elliott

The Evergreen State College oral history project

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FINAL

Elliott: This is August 13, 2020. I'm Marla Elliott and I'm an Evergreen faculty member. I am talking to Magda Costantino, who is a retired administrator and faculty member at Evergreen. Hi, Magda!

Costantino: Hi, Marla.

Elliott: Why don't you start by telling us a little bit about your childhood and growing up.

Costantino: The story of my life up to this point is kind of a little bit complicated. I grew up in Czechoslovakia at the time when it was still a socialist country. I stayed there until the time when there was a kind of revolutionary philosophical change into democracy. But in 1968, the Soviet army invaded us, and at that time, I was out of the country and trying to get back into Slovakia. I wasn't able to. I was faced with machineguns.

Elliott: How old were you in 1968?

Costantino: Twenty-three. I'd just finished my university at that time with my master's in education at the University of Comenius. I was supposed to start teaching at a high school in Bratislava, which is my hometown. I couldn't get back in. They said it was the first time that I found myself outside of the system where I felt I was supposed to belong.

I needed to get somewhere and since I was with a gentleman from Britain, he got me into England for three months. Again, there I am basically a Slovak person who had been not allowed to go back home. Now I am in England and I don't belong there. This is basically the story of my life, always have this challenge, who am I?

Because after three years from London, we moved to State College in Pennsylvania. Again, I carried the Slovak-Brit immigrant story with me. After a couple of years, I got to be admitted into Penn State to work for another master's since they didn't recognize my master's from Slovakia.

Elliott: Can I back you up a little bit? You want to say anything about your childhood in Slovakia, and your parents?

Costantino: Yeah. I was born exactly after the end of the Second World War. My parents had more or less lived with my grandmother in this small village of Aleksince. Basically there was this kind of an experience for them where the Germans were going into Russia this way, then the Russians were

pushing the German army the same way, and my parents were always hiding because they never knew what it was going to mean for them.

Elliott: By "them," you mean your family?

Costantino: My parents and my grandparents and my godmother. Where they were hiding—my grandmother didn't ever, of course, have a refrigerator. She had a hole with her vegetables and things like that. That's where my parents were always trying to hide to survive all of those trips of all of these.

When the war was over–for us it was May 9, 1945—my parents tried to return to Bratislava to the apartment where they had lived before the war. What they found out was that apartment had been used as some kind of a medical center for the Russian army, so what they found was almost two to three feet of all the medical supplies. You can imagine the kinds of medical . . . blood . . . you can just imagine if there was a person who was taking care of all the soldiers and so forth.

When I was growing up—and I was not the only one—the outside half of me had to live and be a child of a socialist country, so to speak. At home, we were always a family that had kind of a religious background, but we had to hide it because we were not allowed to be religious. That was more or less the beginning of my life that there were always two halves of me.

My father always told us, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's." You kind of try to make an identity out of it and it was difficult. This idea of me always having these two halves of me trying to make it into one, it was always difficult because I was adding experiences and values to me. Like after the invasion, the incredible disappointment in what we were always told about what socialism is and the Soviet army and stuff. There are pictures. Some of these I didn't see, but there are pictures of all these Soviet soldiers standing on the tanks petrified because they had no idea. No idea.

Elliott: Do you have siblings?

Costantino: I had a brother. Now he's dead.

Elliott: Older or younger?

Costantino: He was four years older than I was.

Elliott: He was born during the war?

Costantino: He was born during the war, 1941. As I started saying, then I'm trying to figure out what is going to be our next step. We were in Germany, and there were my classmates from my high school who saw me and they said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I have to go back home." They said, "Don't be silly."

It was always this kind of a procedure of my life going. Then with these experiences and values now to England.

Elliott: You were studying outside of Czechoslovakia when the Russian invasion happened?

Costantino: I just completed my master's degree when the Russian invasion came, and I was supposed to go and start teaching, but I never got back there.

Elliott: Where was that that you were studying?

Costantino: The first master's degree was in Slovakia at the University of Comenius in Bratislava—the capital—and I'd just finished it. It was a master of arts, and it was in Spanish and Latin American literature.

When I came to England, at first I had to work in a factory that was making brushes. Then I managed to go and get into a high school in London—not Paddington, not the school where I was teaching Spanish.

Elliott: But you said something about being in Germany? Was that the invasion?

Costantino: The invasion occurred, and I was just returning with my British boyfriend, who then became my husband—back to Slovakia on August 25 because I was supposed to start teaching high school on August 25. On August 25, he brought me to the border—imagine the entry into Evergreen—and we were just saying, "Goodbye, goodbye." I look at the border and there are all these police and army people from the Czechoslovakian army.

The custom officers, who always were extremely, extremely difficult for us to leave Czechoslovakia—sometimes you had to take your clothes off—and this time I'm looking at them and the people were coming up with their passports this way—It's Slovakia and then Austria and then Germany—and they are saying, "Go, go, go! Go, go, go!" Pushing the people the other way from the invaded country, exactly the opposite. There I am, the only person with my suitcase and saying, "I am going home."

Elliott: Trying to get back in.

Costantino: Yeah. They said, "Where are you going?" I said, "Home." They said, "This way," away from home. I couldn't, so I went back to my boyfriend, so I had to go back. Then we didn't know what to do. He had a car, so I said, "Let's go to Germany to Stuttgart. I know that there are some classmates from my high school who eloped." Somehow, we found them, and there were 10 or 11 of them.

Elliott: In Stuttgart?

Costantino: In Stuttgart, yes. One was pregnant to have a baby any minute and they said to me, "Where are you going, Magda?" I said, "Well, I want to get back to Slovakia because if I don't, I'll never

see them again because socialism would not allow us." They said, "Don't do this." They described how everything was torn to pieces. But I had no place to stay, so my friends and I, we had to go to a park and kind of read posters and look at pictures that showed us what was happening in Czechoslovakia.

Then my future husband managed to get in touch with his father in England, who was reluctant, but he did get me a three-month visitor's visa to get into England. Again, as I was there, a woman from socialism comes to England. It was just like . . . you know,

Elliott: Be more specific. What was that like for you to be suddenly in England?

Costantino: I had studied English and so at first, I was kind like happy that I was in England. But, of course, the English I had studied, I couldn't communicate with people. It was like always "Oh, you are from Czechoslovakia. What are you doing?" I even heard "She is from Czechoslovakia, but she is clean."

Elliott: Something happened to extend your three-month visa then?

Costantino: What happened was that when the three-month visa was about coming to the end in December '68, I decided I was going to go back home. That was it. I was going to go back because my father had written all these letters to me about "Only rats run away from a sinking ship. What are you thinking? What are you doing?" A real guilt trip from my family.

Then, of course, my incredible emotion. I wanted my family. My visa lasted until the end of December, so I said, "I'm going to Slovakia. I am not staying here." All this pressure blah blah blah. My boyfriend said to me, "I'm coming with you and we're getting married before the end of December."

His parents almost had a heart attack because his father came from some kind of ministry of education—not education, political something, some international ministry of some kind. They told him that if we go back there, the socialism, which was back there, would not allow me to ever leave the country again. They will let the son go back to England. They were really, really angry with us, so they decided they were going to go with us to see if they could go there and bring us back if something happens.

Can I tell you one story? It was before Christmas. My parents were living in this one-and-a-half-bedroom apartment. Always on Christmas Eve, we ate a carp. They were selling them, live, from a pool in a children's park. We had two of them, and waiting for Christmas, the carps were swimming in our bathtub. There was a separate room for the toilet and another for the bathtub and sink

My boyfriend's mother went into the toilet and then she walked into the bathroom and she saw these two fish swimming in our bathtub. You can imagine the scream that she just—for me, it was normal, but oh, my god. She grabbed her husband and she said, "We're leaving! We're leaving!"

[laughter] We had our wedding on December 26. I had to leave Czechoslovakia before the end of December. Otherwise, they would have kept me there, so that was, again, another experience.

Elliott: You came back to Slovakia for Christmas and then left again?

Costantino: Yeah, I had to, because if I had stayed there, I don't know, they would have not let me go anywhere. I had no place to go so I didn't have any reason not to go back to England. What also happened was that when I applied for an exit visa from Czechoslovakia, my parents had to pay for my education—which in Slovakia at that time was free—and for all my medical expenses, that also to this day are free. When that was paid, then I was allowed to go to the border, say goodbye to them, and leave.

From Hungary, we went through Austria to Germany, and that's where I was now. That's when his father got me that entry visa to come to England

He got a job at Penn State University and I went with him on a visa that was kind of like a supporting wife. I didn't have a permission to be there by myself, but somehow I managed to get to the Penn State University and I had to redo the master's degree that I had completed in Slovakia because they didn't recognize it.

Elliott: Where in Pennsylvania is Penn State?

Costantino: State College, Pennsylvania. The very, very center of Pennsylvania.

Elliott: What's the name of the city?

Costantino: State College. Somehow, I managed to be accepted into another way of studying Spanish and literature and linguistics, exactly what I did in Slovakia. It's funny, when I got the MA there after two and a half years, then they recognized my degree from Slovakia, so I ended up with two master's degrees.

At that particular time, the famous thing that happened was suddenly somebody decided that now we needed bilingual education because we had all these immigrants from Latin America, but they didn't have anybody who spoke Spanish. They got some people from Puerto Rico and they found me speaking five languages, so they quickly put me into a bilingual education program. After three more years, I got a PhD in bilingual education.

Elliott: What five languages do you speak?

Costantino: Slovak, my native, and then Czech, Russian, Spanish and English.

Elliott: Makes sense. About what year is it when you're done with your PhD at Penn State?

Costantino: It was about 1971-1972. I went through a divorce in between, which is another punch in your face. That's when I met Art [Costantino], my current husband of 42 years. We married in State

College, Pennsylvania, and then I got these jobs at Penn State. But again, with all my three graduate degrees, I never got the professor's title, it was always instructor. I was the Director of an ESL program. I never really got the position at the university that everybody else with my amount of degrees would have, of course, got.

There I am, teaching in the bilingual education program at Penn State, and everything as an instructor. They'd send me to Puerto Rico to supervise all the students, but never as a professor. Again, it's "She's from Czechoslovakia, etc." It just kind of went like that until Art and I got tired of State College. It just turned into just kids, kids, kids. I'd been there for 12 years and just suddenly you need a change.

Art got a job at Toledo University in Ohio. I followed him again without a job, but I received a job at the University of Findlay. There I was the Director of their intensive English Language Institute. At one time in my life, I got an academic job of a professor. I was also teaching in the Master of Education program.

But in between, Art decided that he didn't want to stay in Toledo, and he came to Olympia and he got a job here at The Evergreen State College. A year later, I followed him, so you see how I got here.

Elliott: You waited. You stayed a year in Ohio while Art came to Olympia?

Costantino: Yes, because I refused to leave the only job where I was recognized. [laughing] I followed him a year later, and again, waiting here without a job or something like that. Then I got a job in this new program, which is the Evergreen Center for Educational Improvement. It was one of those programs like they had in between. I think, Dr. Barbara Smith was the Director of a similar kind of—

Elliott: Barbara Smith was the Provost.

Costantino: Yeah, but before then she was the Director of a similar kind of outward-oriented program, which was for labor.

Elliott: The Labor Center at Evergreen?

Costantino: Labor Center, yes. Then Jean MacGregor was doing Educational Improvement. I was appointed the Director of this, but there was absolutely no plan for it. There was no idea of what it was supposed to be.

Elliott: What year is this now?

Costantino: 1974.

Elliott: At Evergreen, 1974 that's very early years.

Costantino: No, I'm sorry, 1994. I kind of had to give it an idea what we wanted to make it. Jean MacGregor was the first one who walked into my office—she was so lovely always—and so we focused on environmental education. That was the first program.

My next program was again focused on immigrants and students of second language education because they were always put down as blah blah blah. I did a program which showed in photographs and stories the ESL students teaching their parents and their families. They switched their role and we had a major, major exhibition. We had maybe 250, maybe 300 parents and grandparents and everybody coming to see the exhibition, and the kids talking about their experience. They brought food and whatever.

Elliott: Back up just a little for me. Can you tell me a little about arriving in Olympia and arriving at Evergreen? Did you have the offer for this job when you arrived in Evergreen, or did you arrive and then it arose?

Costantino: No, it arose. It was created. Before I was appointed—and there was a committee of five people—Jean, and Jan Kido was there, and Russ Lidman, and a couple more people that I don't remember. It was just honestly, nobody knew what it was supposed to be. [laughing] It just had this wonderful name, Educational Improvement. It just happened, but I had absolutely no hope for anything but bilingual education issues. There was no place for it at Evergreen.

Elliott: The staff of the Center is you and Jean MacGregor?

Costantino: No, Jean MacGregor was doing the environmental education. We just happened to have offices on the same floor.

Elliott: You're the only staff person for this Service Center?

Costantino: Yes. Then I got a secretary because I couldn't type. I don't know how to type. They didn't teach us that in Czechoslovakia. [laughter] After I started having major educational programs around the schools around in Olympia—

Elliott: How did you start doing that work? Did you go contact the school administration?

Costantino: I don't think so. First, the educational kind of program where I got kind of close to Jean MacGregor, who at that time she was—she is—a wonderful educator. People started seeing me next to her. She would introduce me, and I would say something. There were educational programs at some of the elementary and middle schools in Olympia. A couple of leaders somehow heard about Jean and heard about me, so they came and asked me to help them write grants and so forth. It's always good to have a person from a college when you're doing that.

We started doing the kind of educational programs with them for the students. They were environmentally focused. But environmental education wasn't—it is emotionally and personally incredibly important for me, but I can't tell you that I can teach and tell you how many kilometers we have to reach the moon.

I started putting together teacher education workshops that dealt with working with students with diversity issues. I saw all these bilingual students coming with those pictures. I organized it out of being angry how those kids were being talked about. Just because you can't speak English, you're not stupid. What I found out was that in some of these schools, the ESL teachers were either the worst ones who they wanted to get rid of, or people who were already retired. They didn't have people who—I don't know how many—had degrees and were educated in working with bilingual students.

Elliott: The teachers for bilingual students were marginalized as well as the students?

Costantino: The students who don't speak English who are trying to learn English. At first, I started to work at the Olympia High School as a volunteer working with the Vietnamese students, which was also interesting. It was fascinating because Vietnamese boys and girls, but the girls are not allowed to stay there. They had to go home and sew backpacks. The guys—and especially the eldest guy—they could study because the family always planned to get them to become a doctor to take care of the whole family. That was sort of interesting to see the cultural things.

I started doing all these workshops for the teachers around here—from Olympia, from Washington—about diversity, saying that in Seattle, they had 92 languages at that particular time. I remember this one day when I was talking. I was in the middle of the educational workshop. One of the teachers came to me, poked me in the arm, and said, "You're not white, are you?" I said, "Of course I'm white." She said to me, "Don't tell me. White people don't talk like you do." [laughter] That was another one of those.

Elliott: We're returning after a quick break, and you mentioned this big event where students talked about teaching their parents and had a lot of food. When was that and how did that come about? Tell me more about that.

Costantino: It was about 1995. I was at Evergreen probably not more than a year or so. I started going to schools to observe. I was looking for something that could be used in the education process. What was it that I could offer? I always loved looking at kids that I can tell that came from somewhere else. It's the immigrant identity that always leads me into certain situations.

I saw all these beautiful children and they were always only with their friends. I never saw any of these so-called "American" kids mixing with them. I understand. It's typical, you sit with your friends.

So, I decided that I had to work to change the perception of these children by many Americans that they came from Guatemala, they knew nothing, and they were learning English so that they could be cleaning something. It was really out of my resentment, out of my personal experience of being belittled, or just the way that these kids were perceived by many people—a lot of people will not like what I am saying—as kids who didn't know very much, didn't have much to offer, they were just trying to learn something.

I decided that those children had a tremendous amount of rich knowledge and experience in their lives. What was happening at that time was that since their parents were probably not mostly involved in the American life, so to speak, that I was asking the children, "What do you do at home?" They'd say, "I teach my father how to use the computer." I thought, okay. I forgot who was the company that gave us these cameras that you just used it once.

Elliott: Single-use cameras.

Costantino: Yes. They each had 12 pictures that they could take, and I sent them home and I said, "Take the pictures of your family when you are with your parents." They were so excited. They brought the cameras back, and some were good and some were bad. It was a wonderful collection. This child teaching the parents how to use the computer.

Elliott: You had a photographic exhibit at this event?

Costantino: I had a photographic exhibit. The way that I inspired them to learn how to speak English was, "Tell us what's in the picture." They are looking at it and they are telling us the story. "This is my dad and da-da and he doesn't know"—in other words, that was an ESL class, but they got to perform. They got to show us their best knowledge.

Elliott: I remember hearing that technique described in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the Paulo Freire book.

Costantino: Yes! You make sure that you recognize their identity and don't consider them less than you, what we are hearing right now politically, I am so sorry to have to say that.

Elliott: This was just one Olympia school?

Costantino: I don't remember anymore because it's almost 15 years later. I know at the end, downstairs in the HUB at Evergreen—I think—I decided that we were going to have a celebration of this. We had an exhibition, every child standing in front of their pictures and their photographs and they were all talking about what it was to their parents. I tell you, grandmothers, grandfathers, they all came. The room was packed. And they brought food. It was such a wonderful experience. I still have some of those pictures, but it was a celebration of those kids. I only did that once. I don't have any cameras anymore. Then I moved into the next stage.

Elliott: At some point, you moved to working with local Native tribes. Yes?

Costantino: Yes. It was interesting because my office was downstairs in SPARKS Building. Was it called SPARKS?

Elliott: I'm not sure. Which building?

Costantino: Here is the HUB and it's the first one that have these steps that go to where the President was, and we were downstairs. I don't know.

Elliott: Not the cafeteria?

Costantino: No, the next building next to it.

Elliott: In the SEM II Building or the Library Building?

Costantino: The Library, yeah, but I think it was called SPARKS. I don't honestly remember. It was downstairs. Next to me at that time—I saw a picture of this gorgeous Native American person—again, coming from Czechoslovakia, what did I know about Native Americans? Only those stupid books that were published in Slovakia, so I knew absolutely nothing.

The thing that is the racism and the prejudice, we in Czechoslovakia were taught racism and prejudice against Gypsies and Jews. Those were the two groups. I had those prejudices, but African Americans or Native Americans, nothing. We were not taught.

Elliott: You didn't have cowboy movies?

Costantino: We did, but not too many. We had mostly Russian movies about the Second World War. There is this picture on the doors of this gorgeous guy, and it was Denny Hurtado. He was leaving that day, and I thought that they gave me this office and they threw Denny out of there so that I could move in there. Do you want to hear this story? Okay.

I decided that I couldn't do this to this Native American person, so the following morning, I'm standing in the plaza at Evergreen for Denny to come so that I could apologize to him and tell him that I don't want that office. I see him coming at 10:00 and I'm standing there crying my eyes out. I said, "Can I talk to you?" He had no idea who I was. I said, "I'm so sorry! I have this new job and I noticed that they made you leave your office so that I can go in there." He's saying, "Who are you? No, I'm moving to another office." That was the moment that we became such good friends to this day. He took another job at Evergreen.

Elliott: Can you say his name again?

Costantino: His name is Denny. His Indian name is Sparr. Hurtado. It's another interesting story because his father was from, I think it's Taiwan. The man from that area of the world who were not white were brought in here, again, to do all the hard work without women, and they were not allowed

to have any relationships with Caucasian women. So, he married—who became Denny's mother—a 100 percent Native American from the Skokomish Reservation. That's why he is Hurtado.

Elliott: A Filipino maybe?

Costantino: Filipino, you're absolutely right.

We became excellent friends and he moved to OSPI, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. He was the Director of the Indian Education. Again, they had nothing. It was just all falling to pieces. He saw that I was now working with OSPI on the ESL issues. I was on a number of their committees, while I was also doing the workshops at Evergreen.

The Superintendent of the OSPI, she said to me, "Magda, put together a book, which would be like a summary of the foundational research findings about bilingual education, about learning a second language." I did it, and it was given to just about every ESL teacher in the State of Washington, as far as I know.

Then Denny said, "Hey, Magda, do one for the Indians." That's how—but he introduced me always. You have to have a Native person coming where they all know him and so forth. He'd say, "Here is Magda," and he would tell the story how I cried in the middle of the HUB so that they would look at me and they wouldn't think that I'm someone who comes there. Because what some of the Native American elders, who are like the leaders of the community, when we came there to do a workshop, they would come and they would say, "Listen, we don't want any white people who come here and tell us what's wrong with our kids. If that's what you're planning to do, leave." That happened more than once because it had happened to them many times.

If I had done it without Denny coming there telling them, "Trust her. This is a person to be trusted," they kind of opened the door like this. You tell them you're coming to do this workshop. They'd close the door. They'd had enough. They said Hollywood taught the world about who they are and it's nonsense.

Anyway, I did that research collection for the Native Americans. It required a tremendous amount of research because, again, I didn't know very much. You work with Native American research and the communities. My philosophy was that I was the learner in all of these things. I was the learner, and what I learned, I used my professional judgment I put into these, and I checked with him. They're still giving it out to people.

Then it was more and more I could see the State started focusing on teaching literacy to children, and there were two theories about teaching it the Evergreen way, like teaching the children how to think and use the language from the environment that they knew, and always adding something

new. Or, like what people do, you say the word "school," it's S-C-H-O-O-L. They put it together. Sherry [Walton] and Terry [Ford] and I would object to that.

Elliott: Sherry Walton and Terry who?

Costantino: Terry Ford, the centerpieces of the MiT program at Evergreen, teaching the language mostly, but teaching the language to human beings, and the human being is part of it. It's not just A, B, C. They were just wonderful friends of mine and kind of colleagues.

I looked around and I saw what the Native children were given to read at school. They had no idea what it was about. You imagine like somebody gives me a description—they didn't know the word. They had no experience of reading about kids living in some kind of a rural small town, and they have these beautiful houses and blah blah blah.

I started working with teachers who were elementary school teachers teaching reading and Native Americans who were telling us about their lives and their experiences, and we put it into a literacy curriculum. In other words, the children were reading about carving a canoe, which they had seen, things like that. As I mentioned to you, we had 21 books, stories, written by 21 Native American artists, teachers and so forth. When they heard what we were doing, they came and they said, "What can I do for you?" It was kindergarten to the end of the third grade. OSPI still has it and I am told that people ask for it. But mostly, they are asking for those books is what I was told. But I was still doing all the workshops, not only in Olympia but also conferences.

Elliott: These were teacher education workshops?

Costantino: Mostly, yes, bilingual education and diversity and cross-cultural communication and listening. It was about "Look at us. This is who we are."

I worked at the Yakama Reservation for instance, and Tulalip and so forth. At the Yakama Reservation—I'll never forget this—you have a group of people—this is horrible what I'm going to say—the women teachers were sitting there listening and writing, and there's four or five guys in the back sitting like "What am I doing here?" [Laughter]

Elliott: These are teachers?

Costantino: Oh, yeah. Then there were some elder ones who would say, "I've been teaching this for 35 years. I'm not changing it." You meet all kinds of things, all kinds of people, but what are you going to do?

All of this, and we also applied starting to work with the Student Affairs positions and started writing grants again about environmental education. Phyllis, who was the—

Elliott: Yes, I see her face before me and I'm spacing on her last name, too. She was the Vice President?

Costantino: She was the Director of Student Affairs or something. We were a team—Phyllis Lane and Sherry and Terry, and there was Kathe Taylor, who worked with us, who is now the Assistant Superintendent of OSPI. We joined a group of teachers in environmental education.

Elliott: So, you're continuing to work on environmental education and ESL and education and Native American culturally appropriate education.

Costantino: All of it. There was another group. Curriculum development around the history and culture for Native Americans was becoming politically talked about. There is this gentleman, who is a member of our government—he's from the Tulalip Tribe, I forgot his name right now—and he was working, I think, with the Governor saying, "The curriculum has to be changed. The curriculum has to be changed."

I started working with the Chehalis Tribe to work on the development of the Chehalis culture and history of their tribe. What was fascinating, I had a group of Chehalis elders and people, maybe 30 of them, in a kind of workshop environment. It was like "What would you like the children to learn and know?" And they had never had any teaching or anything like this.

They would sit down, and they would say, "Oh, my grandfather would bring these frogs home and we just da-da-da." The other one would say, "Oh, my grandfather, they would always go hunting and they would be catching this"—and so they would put together the stories of their lives that they learned from their grandfathers and grandmothers and their experiences.

I had a group of people who we put it all together, and we put together like five learning outcomes, which was at the beginning it was before the Europeans came what it looked like. Then now the Europeans came and the impact on it. We had the fifth one, which was the identity creation right now. Many of them now they are their own states, so to speak, and what is their identity? Watching their major, major industry growing and the casino, but it's fascinating. They arrived at their own identity, their own economic and political identity. That's what we did for the Chehalis. It took five years to put it together.

Then we needed to convert it into a curriculum to bring it into the classroom, so we have three of them. We started with a secondary class, and then there were teachers, mostly from Rochester next to the reservation. Then somebody said, "We have to do it for the middle schools," and then somebody said, "Oh, we have to do it for the elementary schools." So, I have three books like this—big ones— and what am I going to do with them? That was another one of those.

Those things I consider the highlight of my achievement because I learned so much and I became like one of the Native Americans. I became like one of them. I wasn't their enemy. They didn't look at me whether I was clean or not. [laughing]

Elliott: Who was your boss at Evergreen? Who did you report to?

Costantino: At first it was Barbara Smith.

Elliott: When she was running the Labor Center?

Costantino: She was running the Labor Center and she was sort of like a supporter. Nobody was working with me on the content or leadership or whatever. Barbara was nice and supportive, and I could tell that she was appreciating what I was doing.

Jean MacGregor was just a kind person next to me. She was incredibly busy, but she would come and say, "Oh, I heard about this. This is really wonderful."

Elliott: It sounds like there was nobody really looking over your shoulder or telling you what to do or how to do it. But you must have been reporting to somebody. You must have been under a Vice President on an organizational chart somewhere, but it doesn't sound like that functioned much in your life.

Costantino: To tell you the truth, I was nobody for a lot of people—most people—at Evergreen. The staff, some knew me or knew who I was because they knew Art, and they saw us somewhere together and they would know that I'm Art's wife. Those were like the nicest people to me. Faculty, it was Sherry, Terry and then Pat Krafcik, who is of Slovak origin. She does work with the ethnic group called Rusini, and a couple friends from the MiT program. Otherwise, nobody.

Elliott: But you formed alliances with all these people in the tribes, you formed alliances with people in schools and OSPI, and I'm assuming with the ESDs, the Educational Service Districts?

Costantino: No. They felt, I think, that they were the legitimate professional development group and I was just some intruder from Evergreen.

Elliott: You were the rogue.

Costantino: I was the rogue, yeah. It was interesting that not only was I doing all this work from the Evergreen Center, but when I went out, I was the recruiter. I was the representative of Evergreen among the schools around here. There was a break in the workshops, and somebody would say, "You know, my son is trying to go to Evergreen. What do they do there?"

Elliott: I had a job where I was sort of marginalized within the organization, but I was the front of the organization to the community. It sounds very much like you.

Costantino: Exactly.

Elliott: They think you run the place.

Costantino: Yeah, you run the place, and then you represent the place. You are it. You are the place. Yeah, that was me. But honestly, there would be a faculty meeting. I'd go there but nobody would say hello to me, other than maybe my friends.

Elliott: That's surprisingly true of regular faculty, too. You have your half dozen friends and then, "Eh, who are those other people."

Costantino: It hurt me, to tell you the truth, because I am a person who likes friends. It was hard for me to accept that I belonged, but I didn't belong. You know what I mean? It was just like, okay. Like you have a house, and somebody would come and be your renters, they rent a room.

Elliott: You felt like you were renting a room at Evergreen?

Costantino: Yeah.

Elliott: Rather than being part of the family.

Costantino: Yes, yes. Then in 2008—14 years later—when I started teaching in the MA program for educational—

Elliott: Yes, would you talk more about how that came about and how you got into it?

Costantino: There was an MiT program and—

Elliott: There still is, yeah.

Costantino: Which was an absolutely wonderful educational program at Evergreen. It lasted two years. It was just wonderful. Sherry and Terry were the leaders, but there were other wonderful people who were working with them.

Elliott: This was an additional education degree program?

Costantino: Yes.

Elliott: I thought that was a Master in Education, an M.Ed. You know better than I.

Costantino: I don't remember because I got sick. But it took me a year before in the 2007 when I was putting it all together, developing it.

Elliott: So, you helped develop the curriculum for this new master's program.

Costantino: I'll just say I was developing it. I was appointed the Director of that program. I was given this recognition as the faculty. I don't know what it was because I started being ill then.

LLyn De Danaan was also another wonderful supporter when we were working with the Native Americans. Yvonne Peterson was also helping us. Then Tina Kuckkahn-Miller and the people from the Longhouse, they knew what we were doing so they were sort of supportive and nice, kind of like funny people who recognized our work and wanted to contribute.

There was another project that I wanted to tell you about. Shoot, it was a minute ago in my head. I have short-term memory problems sometimes. [laughing]

This is kind of like my experience at Evergreen. I was proud of it. I was proud of it. I was proud of Evergreen. I got the feeling of this is a unique place.

Elliott: How does your work continue and survive, either at Evergreen or elsewhere?

Costantino: I know only that Denny tells me that the Office of Indian Education in OSPI still gives out curriculum and those books that teach, and it's spread all over. Teachers will come and say, "Do you have da-da-da?" In fact, when I was moving out of my office, I brought home copies of that most precious work, and now it's in my closet, like what am I going to do with it? I asked Denny and he said, "Just give it to the Office of Indian Education," because they still are asked for the curriculum. So, when they open up, I'm going to give it to them because what am I going to do with it? Basically, I was very, very ill.

Elliott: I know. We're lucky to still have you. I am so happy having this chance to talk to you and to hear about your work, because I didn't really have an opportunity—I knew that you were working in K-12 education and supporting multicultural K-12 education, but that's about as much I knew.

Costantino: It was probably more than most people knew. [laughing]

Elliott: Yeah, and you've really had an amazing career and have done amazing work and I'm really happy to have heard about it. What else would you like to say for posterity? What else do you want to say to the Evergreen historians?

Costantino: I put together a library. There was not one book there when I started. A spiral notebook is what I bought. I put together this library that Sherry called the Magda Costantino's library. They both did a lot of photographs they framed from the Native Americans who worked with us in the books and so forth. All of my original work from all the Native Americans, I had to sign a contract with them that this was going to be—and so when I go to—

Elliott: You signed a contract with the Native American tribes, or with Evergreen?

Costantino: With the people who wrote the books, or who allowed me to tell their story. I had a group committee of the tribal representatives. So, it was all legal.

Lynn Adair was my wonderful so-called secretary, but she was like my right and left hands. She was the centerpiece of the Evergreen Center. We were such good partners. When I was leaving, we had a storage room downstairs in Seminar II, I think, so we carried a lot of the books—these were all the work of us—downstairs so that they would be—and we'd try to ask if we could put into the Archives. Well, the Archives got flooded or something like that. [laughing]

Elliott: The reading curriculum or the history curriculum or both?

Costantino: Both of them. Both of them. They were the first ones of that particular kind. Then I learned that in some other states some people tried to do the same thing because there was nothing for Native students. Nothing.

The teachers who started using the secondary curriculum for the Chehalis were in Rochester, which is right next to the reservation. They would say to me, "You know what happened to me when I started talking about this and this? A student who never said a word would wait until the class was over and he was alone in the class. He would say, 'My grandfather said this to me.'" In other words, they became human beings. I don't know how to say it.

They would say, "The Native American students had never raised their hands before. They'd just sort of sit like this and very often they would wait until the class was over and do some work or not do some work. It wasn't about them." Then in the curriculum for the Chehalis, he talked about the story of his grandfather who used to tell him. I don't know.

Elliott: That's a pretty darn good legacy from where I sit, Magda. I think you should be proud of that. And who would think that a little girl from Bratislava would become the great empowerer of the Chehalis Tribe?

Costantino: When she knew absolutely nothing about it. When I was at Penn State studying bilingual education and cross-cultural communication there were a couple of Native Americans who were in the class. There was this very tall gentleman—the first Indian, so to speak—whom I had ever seen in my life. I wanted to touch him.

I remember that he was talking about his experience and he said, "They trained us all as welders because somebody decided that we could tolerate height. They trained us as welders, and they sent us to build the New York City high rises."

Another thing that I learned was about the boarding schools where the Native American children, stolen from their parents, were brought into—then in Pennsylvania, I went into one of those old boarding schools where I saw these graves. They were graves of the Skokomish tribal members from over here.

When people are talking about "the Indians are drinking," these are many of those participants who, when they were children, they were brought, stolen from the parents, and now they are 55 years old and they are wondering, why did my parents give me up? And now they are learning that they didn't give them up. They were stolen from the parents by people who believed to kill the Indian but protect the person. The purpose of those schools was to kill the Indian identity.

One thing that also breaks my heart, and I'm sure yours, was that when they brought them—from here, let's say, to Arizona—the first thing that they did for them in the boarding school was that they cut their hair. In many of these tribes, when your father or your mother dies, you cut your hair. The first day there, they cut their hair and the kids were crying all night long because they thought their families all died. And they were not allowed to speak their own native languages. They put nails into their tongue. If you read this, it's just like . . .

Elliott: Yeah, it's horrible. It's a horrible thing.

Costantino: Horrible. Horrible.

Elliott: What else do you want to say before I stop the recording? We are at an hour and a half out.

Costantino: I loved the opportunity that I had at Evergreen to learn so much about issues that I really didn't know very much about, mostly the Native Americans but about the ESL students in the United States and in the State of Washington.

What I was producing, so to speak, was mostly what I learned. I mean, I had a foundation, but on your foundation, you build new things. That's what I loved the most was that in a way, I didn't have a supervisor. Nobody told me, "You have to do this. Why did you do this?" So, my own work, I did what I thought needed—I loved the freedom. I could sort of say, "I didn't have anybody. Nobody cared about what I was doing." Yeah, that's one side of it. But on the other hand, I was free to do things that I saw that were needed, that were valued by the people with whom I was working, and I learned new things, and that's my reward.

Elliott: That's a wonderful summing up. Shall I stop the recording now?

Costantino: Yeah, yeah you can.