

Susan Aurand
Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal
The Evergreen State College oral history project
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FINAL

Fiksdal: I'm here with Susan Aurand on Monday, September 13, 2021. This is Susan Fiksdal. We're going to start Susan's oral history. We're going to begin with a question about your childhood and where you grew up. I'm really interested to know about your years in high school, and how you might have thought about college, whether your parents graduated from college, that sort of thing.

Aurand: I was born in 1950 in Indianapolis, but then we moved to central Ohio, and I grew up in central Ohio just north of Columbus.

My parents had both graduated from college. My mother was, first, a speech therapist, and then later went back and got her master's degree as a school psychologist. They were the first generation of their families to go to college, and college was a big deal. My dad waited to retire until the last of ultimately was eight kids got through college. For him, that was his job was to get us through college.

That was an expectation, although for women, for the girls—we were mostly girls—there was not expectation that you did anything with a college education apart from being a support to your husband, temporarily working if he wasn't the fulltime breadwinner that a man should be in that era. It was a very conservative, religious upbringing. The '60s passed way overhead over my area of Ohio, I vaguely knew that that was happening, but it did not impact me at all. I was very sheltered. Nice—a very sheltered and safe feeling childhood.

Fiksdal: Were you in a small town?

Aurand: We were in a small town. First, Reynoldsburg, which is a suburb community, and then Worthington on the north side of Columbus. But mostly, it was just that my parents were both quite religious. My dad was working as an aeronautical engineer with government contracts, and impressed on us that if we ever got in trouble he would lose his job, so we were squeaky clean kids. What can I say?

I loved school, and I was the second child. I was in that fortunate position in the family where my older sister tested all the limits, got in trouble, thought she was paving the way for freedom, and all I had to do was do the opposite. I got what I wanted by being sneaky second kid. She made me look

good. I was the star kid because I wasn't rebelling. I got what I wanted by conforming. I liked school. I liked all the subjects and was able to do well. Most of school is showing up and doing the work on time.

I loved the tasks. In high school, I was one of those geeky kids who would go home, and in advance of a test in French, would make up a test for myself.

Fiksdal: That's impressive. That never happened to me. [laughter] The idea never even occurred to me.

Aurand: I would make up the whole test and then I would take the test. My grandmother had been a schoolteacher in a one-room schoolhouse in Michigan—my dad's mom—and I think I was destined to teach. I liked the organization of it, the papers. When we would go to my grandmother's house, I would love to go get into her old desk where there were rulers and tape and pencils. It was exciting. I remember as a kid conscripting my younger siblings into a "school" that I made up where I got to be the teacher and they had to be the students.

Fiksdal: You had so many, that must have been quite easy to organize them. [laughter] Corral them.

Aurand: The upshot was that I did well in school. Once you start getting a bunch of As, it becomes kind of a game to see if you can get As, and so I got all A's throughout high school. Then it was a game of let's see if I can get all A's throughout college, which I did.

Fiksdal: Where did you go to college?

Aurand: My first year, I went to Ohio State, and then transferred to Kalamazoo College, which was a small, private, liberal arts college in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where my mother had gone undergraduate studies.

I was interested in many subjects. I didn't know what I wanted to study. I thought I'd be an archeologist that collected fossils, all that stuff. Then I thought I'd be a psychologist like my mother, because that was completely fascinating. She would read books to us when we were driving about psychology.

I loved French. I loved learning a new language, and I always liked art. I could have gone to school on an art scholarship, and I was headed to the University of Michigan as an art major. But my mom passed away suddenly in my senior year in high school, and that changed the direction of my life dramatically. My dad quickly married because he was left with five kids and didn't know what to do, so he married this nice widow who had two kids, and then they had other kids, so that's how we wound up with eight.

Fiksdal: Oh, my goodness.

Aurand: My family suddenly dramatically changed, so I scrapped my plans to go to the University of Michigan and wound up going to Ohio State because I wanted to be closer to this new family that appeared.

And I scrapped plans to be an art major because my dad wasn't particularly supportive of it. It had been my mother who would drive me to art lessons and help me apply for art scholarships. I took art through college—a couple of things through college—but Kalamazoo was known for its language programs, and it was a pioneer school for foreign study and had a very tiny art department, so I thought, well, I'll do what it does well.

My dad said, "You should do something where you can get a job," which meant French teaching, so I became a French major. Studied abroad in France. Kept doing art as a minor. Prepared to teach middle school French. Did my teaching certification. Got married. That was the other expectation in my family is that you got married, either before you got out of college or the instant you got out of college. [laughing] I did it the quarter before I got out of college. I tried to get out of it. Personal life is a whole other thing.

Anyway, I lived at home the quarter before I got married. I did my student teaching and realized, this is not my demographic, middle school kids, who really are not interested in learning a foreign language at that point. No. I could do it now. I could enjoy that energy now, but I was too serious. I was a very serious, straitlaced, naïve young woman.

I had this conundrum. What do I do with a major in French when I don't want to teach it? I applied to graduate school in art, and I had a good enough portfolio—marginally good enough—and all these As, so I got accepted at Ohio State for graduate school. I had to make up some classes the first semester of graduate school.

Fiksdal: I think it's extraordinary, though. That was your minor.

Aurand: Yeah, it was a leap. It was both a leap in terms of career, and then a leap for them. They said, "This is a risk, but obviously, you know how to learn stuff. You've got A's in calculus and A's in this and A's in that." "Oh, yeah, I can learn stuff," and I was a hard worker, so I caught up.

But graduate school is supposed to be your wonderful experience and get you connected you to this network of people that you stay in touch with. It wasn't that for me. It was just an unhappy—I was back in Ohio. I was still trying to process my mother's death. The program there was a great technical training, but it was all male professors, one of whom was sexually harassing me and others—undergraduate students. It was a miserable time.

Fiksdal: And you were married.

Aurand: I was married.

Fiksdal: What was your husband doing?

Aurand: He was doing graduate work there in theater.

Fiksdal: So, you had some support. You were both in school.

Aurand: Yeah, and I had a fellowship. I had financial support. I was not happily married. I hadn't wanted to get married, but I did it to please my dad, to please my family. They liked him. They thought we should. That's another story. Anyway, my relationship wasn't much of a support.

I was enrolled in the MFA program. I did my thesis. I did all of that stuff. What I had left to do was one quarter of humanities, and I said, "I'm out of here." I was so unhappy that I quit the program early and took an MA, and they said, "You won't get a job if you don't have the MFA." I said that I need to be done. I had done all of the MFA requirements, and I had this whole background in French and literature and other stuff. I didn't have any shortage of humanities. I said, "That's okay."

I was applying for jobs and the deal I had with my husband was first one to get a job, we'll go there. How I wound up at Evergreen is astonishing to me because it was like the universe pointing. My sister, two years younger, when I was just graduating from college, had gotten the very first Evergreen catalog—which was hand calligraphied—and she read it to me. She was so excited. "There's this new college. You can study game theory. They do these things called programs." I was going, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm trying to do my student teaching. I'm trying to get ready to get married."

Then my aunt, my mother's twin sister—identical twin—had moved to Olympia about that time. With my mother gone, there was nothing holding her in the Midwest anymore. She had always wanted to move out here. She'd come out as a young woman. She moved out and she said, "You should come out and see. They're starting this college."

Fiksdal: That is extraordinary. She must have been close to you if she was a twin sister.

Aurand: Oh, yeah. They were so identical they could trade places as adults.

Fiksdal: What a relief, in a way, to have someone like that.

Aurand: Yeah, and so she was living on a piece of property that backed up to the college property. I came out and looked at it and I thought, okay, fine, I'll apply here, among many other places.

Fiksdal: What year was that do you think?

Aurand: I came in '73 and then applied.

Fiksdal: Because we were in the same cohort when you got a job.

Aurand: Right, so I applied. The other thing was that the year I applied, LLyn De Danaan, then LLyn Patterson, was the Hiring Dean, and she had gone to Ohio State, and she was very disposed—it was also

they wanted to hire young women. On the faculty the first couple years had been an older woman named Peggy Dickinson who taught ceramics.

Fiksdal: She was terrific.

Aurand: She was great, and she wanted to retire. So, there was a gap in ceramics, which was what my master's work was in, and they wanted to bump up languages, so they needed somebody in ceramics and French.

I came out and did the whole three days of interviewing, which was a hoot. That alone is an amazing story how they used to do interviews.

Fiksdal: You might have to explain it a little bit because actually, I was never interviewed, and I don't know about a three-day interview. I know all about the two-day interview. What in the world did they do with you for three days?

Aurand: They handed me a schedule that just said this hour, go to this office. They didn't say who I was seeing. One time, I go into one office. I knock on the door, and I walk in, and Andrew Hanfman starts speaking to me French. Conducts the whole interview in French. We chitchat for a while. He says, "Thank you very much." We're done. I get up. I go out.

Fiksdal: That was your test, apparently.

Aurand: Then I go to the next room. I knock on the door. I walk in. Here's Chuck Nisbet, Craig Carlson, and Paul Sparks.

Fiksdal: Oh, my goodness! [laughter] What a strange mix of people.

Aurand: Right. Paul has a terrible cold. He pulls out a giant bowie knife and starts cleaning his fingernails.

Fiksdal: Oh, my gawd. How horrifying!

Aurand: I'm still this uptight young woman—

Fiksdal: Anyone would find that gross!

Aurand: Craig Carlson asks me whether I dream in color or in black and white, and what I think of Anais Nin. Chuck is asking, "Tell us about your experience." I thought, this is a really interesting school. Okay. It went on like that for three days. I never knew who I was seeing. Was this person a faculty member? Was this person a dean?

Fiksdal: Did you get to meet any students?

Aurand: No, no students. It was the middle of summer. I don't think they had—

Fiksdal: You and I didn't meet.

Aurand: No. It was the beginning of the summer, I think. Maybe students were gone. I don't think there were students. I don't think there was a summer school at that time.

Fiksdal: No, there wasn't.

Aurand: There were faculty. I'm not sure what time of year it would have been. But anyway, there were no public presentations. It was very unlike the hiring process later. It was just, go and talk to this person and see if what they think.

Fiksdal: Did we have a ceramics studio at that time?

Aurand: Yeah, we did.

Fiksdal: Was there a staff person in charge?

Aurand: No, so when I came on and Peggy retired, I was the staff person also, driving the lab truck up to get 500 tons of clay.

Fiksdal: Oh, how horrible.

Aurand: Servicing the kilns. Installing the burners. All the technical stuff. I told this story the other night because we were talking about Mount St. Helens in 1980. I was up there on a Sunday night finishing up firing one of the big gas kilns that we had outside at that point, and the security guy comes around and says, "Young lady, you have to go home. The ash is coming." [laughter] Okay!

I became the technician when I came on. The ceramics studio was different than it is now. It hadn't been remodeled. The kilns were outdoors.

Fiksdal: But we had kilns.

Aurand: Oh, yeah. We had a big gas kiln. We had a rack—

Fiksdal: I wonder where those came from. Peggy was in ceramics then.

Aurand: Peggy was in ceramics.

Fiksdal: But she must have helped get that there.

Aurand: Yeah, she built those.

Fiksdal: Here's a story of Peggy. She's terrific, just a wonderful person. She's in her office, but a whole bunch of women are standing in there. I don't remember why we're all there, five of us around her desk. She is trying to talk to us, but the phone starts to ring, and she's just argh! We're all just pulled in 500 directions, so I was glad to see that she was annoyed. She tries to continue talking, the phone keeps ringing, and finally, she picks up the phone and shouts into it, "No!" And hangs up. [laughter] I never had the guts to do something like that, but I understood the feeling completely, and I loved her instantly.

Aurand: She was something, and she was one of the people who I walked into to interview.

Fiksdal: But she left before you really were hired, or do you remember her being there?

Aurand: No, she left. She was there, I think, the first year that I was hired—maybe a year or two more—but she knew she was going to retire. She was basically the one that looked at my ceramics work and said, “I like your work,” which is interesting because one of the other troubles I’d had in graduate school—I quickly gravitated to making sculpture, and everybody else was doing pots of one kind or another, so nobody had anything to say to me about my work, so that was an interesting experience. But she liked it, and even though it was a little on the dark side—I was still processing grief—

Fiksdal: How big were these sculptures?

Aurand: Some of them were six feet big.

Fiksdal: Oh!

Aurand: I had just leave it off, break it up and leave it.

Fiksdal: Oh, how awful. But you had pictures.

Aurand: Yeah, yeah. Amazingly, I got hired. There was no tenure, so it was like, well, this will be a good first job and then I’ll figure out what I want to do with my life. Then, after the first three-year contract, it was, this is okay. I’m really liking this. After six years, I thought, I’ve got this figured out now!

It was perfect for me because I loved that it was a chance to keep going to college, keep learning all this new stuff. I remember having one really terrific quarter in college when all of the classes that I took seemed to magically connect. I was taking cultural anthropology, and a psychology class, and an art class, and a French class, all of which were about how we conceptualize the world, how we make these models of the world, and how your language breaks up reality into these different categories, and what the mythologies are of different cultures. It was perfect, and then you get to make art about that.

That’s really what I wound up doing most of my career at Evergreen was teaching art, not as this thing apart from culture, but as a language that allows you to look at all of these different models of the world. The notion of translating, I was so glad to have that language background, even though I stopped teaching French at Evergreen, because I was good at translating one discipline to another discipline. Teaching with a geologist, and then saying, “Okay, what about this can you think about in terms of your own life, or your own place in history, or your own stuff?” And making connections, because it’s like when you have a term in one language, you try to find the equivalent in your language. Just doing that and showing people what the equivalents are.

Fiksdal: That’s a nice way of putting it. I think you’re right. I think our job was to constantly learn. Because we had to learn something about geology so that we could do that work of coming up with some questions and some themes and some ways of teaching.

I wonder if we can go back for a moment to your French teaching at Evergreen, because my memory is quite vague. I remember teaching an awful lot of French for several years.

Aurand: Yes, you did.

Fiksdal: I didn't teach programs until something like 1979, because, in fact, we didn't know how to do that. No one did. Not me, not anyone else. I did corral you into a summer class on year, which was just so fun.

Aurand: It was a summer intensive. That was really fun.

Fiksdal: We just really enjoyed it. I don't know what the students thought, two Susans teaching French. [laughter] It was really kind of funny also. But we were both quite serious. I remember giving the second-year students a history book to read in French, and I made sure they did it. They were not all that advanced, but it was fabulous. We had such good students. Tell me about the other French teaching that you did there.

Aurand: I'm trying to remember. I was trying to remember whether that was the only French teaching I did. Let me see.

Fiksdal: I remember that I found that you had French in your background. I asked you, and you were a little unsure of whether you wanted to do it or not.

Aurand: I think that may have been the only one. Because that was the summer of 1975.

Fiksdal: Yeah, that's it. There was a summer quarter by then, apparently.

Aurand: There was.

Fiksdal: I'm so glad I got to teach with you then because it was my first team teaching experience.

Aurand: Right. But right after that, by '76, I was the ceramics person.

Fiksdal: I see, so Peggy had then left.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: And there you were. For me, I knew ceramics was your background, but all the work that I've seen and loved of yours has been painting, so you'll have to tell us that story.

Aurand: I took art through high school and did painting, and I can remember spontaneously doing this painting that kind of scared me because in my family, you weren't supposed to be unhappy, or if you were unhappy, you certainly weren't supposed to show you were unhappy or anything. I did this painting where two people were clearly having this argument or something, and I thought, oh, no, that's too revealing. Let's not do that.

Plus, my art teacher was a potter, so he I learned ceramics in high school as well, and I thought, this is safe. But I kept gravitating toward more narrative things, which is why I wound up doing

sculpture in ceramics. Then I thought, I need a warehouse to store it! This is hard. Let's just do this two dimensionally because where are you going to put all this big stuff? I thought, maybe I need to switch back to 2 - D; use the same ideas but do them two dimensionally, because it would be a lot easier.

That's what happened. It was 1980, especially when I had a first sabbatical and went to France to study symbiotics and contemporary French art.

Fiksdal: Where did you go in France?

Aurand: I lived in Paris for almost a year. Got a studio. Worked.

Fiksdal: Interesting.

Aurand: But I didn't have any facilities. I had been doing ceramics up to that point for my own work.

Fiksdal: Were you in the Beaux Arts there?

Aurand: No, I was in up in the 19th arrondissement. I had a converted studio in a big building that was a converted sugar warehouse. It was all artists of every stripe you could imagine. It was a whole community of artists. It was wonderful.

But I couldn't do ceramics, so I started doing drawings, works on paper. I'd had one painting class in college and had to basically teach myself to paint.

Fiksdal: That's just extraordinary.

Aurand: Read a book and teach yourself to paint. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Yeah, why haven't I heard that yet? Interesting. No, Susan, it is extraordinary. It is. So, you were around a lot of other artists. Do you remember any collaboration?

Aurand: I had good friends. We didn't do any collaborative work, but I had a printmaker who was a good friend, and I learned monoprinting from him. Another friend was a book artist, both of which I do now, monoprinting and book arts.

Fiksdal: Wow. Was it international or were they mostly French artists?

Aurand: The printmaker was a Dutch artist.

Fiksdal: What about your husband?

Aurand: I was divorced by then. I was single. Back to the French teaching, no, I didn't do much with it. I always encouraged students, and because I knew a lot of the French history, especially the French art history, I did a lot of teaching of that as part of any program.

Fiksdal: I think you came as a guest lecturer a couple times to my program. That was a big help.

Aurand: I don't know why I didn't teach French. I think because other arts faculty were already taking students to France and Europe—Gordon Beck and then Bob Haft—that I didn't. I think I shied away

from the responsibility of taking students overseas, especially after your stories about taking students to Mexico. [laughing]

Fiksdal: I have so many stories, yeah. To Mexico, yeah, that was big. That was in the '70s, and I had even more adventures with the French students. I agree. Not only a huge responsibility. You just don't know what's going to happen.

Aurand: Yeah, you don't know.

Fiksdal: I'm thinking, let's take a break.

[recording stopped]

Okay, so here we are back. I wanted to ask you, Susan, let's go back to when you first came to Evergreen. In languages, I didn't team teach for quite a while, but apparently, you did, so I was wondering if you could talk about those early years of team teaching, and describe your programs.

Aurand: In the early years, the fashion was for large programs. The very first quarter, I taught with Earl McNeil and Jovana Brown. She was hired as Dean of the Library, but they required her to teach a program before she took up her deaning duties. It was called Self-Exploration Through Autobiography. We all had to write our own autobiographies and the students wrote autobiographies. Peter Elbow was the fourth, who was a writing instructor who wrote *Writing Without Teachers*. Famous book.

At the end of the quarter, we went to do our faculty evaluations at Peter's house, and I think Jovana was very nervous. She was very uptight. This whole team thing was not her schtick, so she pulled out four joints and passed them around. [laughter] I'm maybe the only person in the whole country who has never done drugs of any kind—nothing—so I thought, okay, now I know really where I am. We all declined, but some people took them for later.

The second program was also a big program. That was just one quarter, and then the rest of the year was Interplay of the Arts, which was also four faculty. It had me as the visual artist, Ainara Wilder in theater, Bill Winden in music, and Bud Johanson in dance.

Fiksdal: Oh, my goodness! It sounds fabulous.

Aurand: It was about finding the connections between those disciplines. I was scrambling because I didn't have a background in performance art. We did installation stuff that I'd never done myself, but I knew about it, so why not try it? It was wonderful because it was free rein. Did all kinds of odd performance things. And the students were so game. They were so ready to try stuff. It was great. It was very good.

At that point, the COM Building hadn't even been built, but they were doing theater productions. Ainara was doing these great theater productions in the lobby of the library.

Fiksdal: I remember. It was right up there in the middle of the foyer.

Aurand: Right. The following year was a year-long program with Craig Carlson, a poet.

Fiksdal: Well, you must have impressed him in that initial interview.

Aurand: Craig was smart, he was lovable, he was like this elf. But I couldn't figure him out, and every day he would leave me this odd little note or some cartoon or something that I just didn't get. He would come to campus in camouflage because he thought, if we're really going to revolutionize education, it's like a war against these ingrained ideas, so he came dressed for battle. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Craig was a poet, right?

Aurand: He was a poet. Wonderful poet. I was still just like, I don't get this. I was still very, very serious. Then he was sick for six weeks, and I didn't even know you could ask for help, so I was teaching my seminars and his seminars, supervising my students' projects and his. But we got through it, and we had a good time.

Here's a remarkable thing. His booklist for that program had 100 books on it. He made the bookstore order all of them.

Fiksdal: I can't believe they did it.

Aurand: I said, "Do you expect the students to read them all?" He said, "No, but they should know these books." For me, it had everything from the *Tao Ching* on it to . . . it was a remarkable . . . I'm blanking now on some of the other books, but it was like everything you wish you had read—novels, philosophy, all kinds of stuff. Because he just thought everybody should in their lifetime read these books.

Fiksdal: It was almost like a Great Books list?

Aurand: It was like a Great Books list.

Fiksdal: You only had one book a week as usual, right?

Aurand: Yeah, we had one. [laughing] I said, "Which one?"

Fiksdal: Thirty out of the 100 that you read.

Aurand: The thing is, I held onto that. I'm sure a number of students did. I hung on to that list and chipped away at it for years. I'm still working on it. I thought, this is great. Because it trusted that what the students really wanted was to be educated. It had the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* on there. These things that, okay, open your mind, find out about other cultures, find out about philosophy, read this great book of poetry, read this novel. Understand, so you can make your own mind up. That was the premise of it, instead of, "Here, I have all the knowledge, and I'm just going to spoon feed you this."

Fiksdal: Do you remember, were the students writing poetry and doing ceramics?

Aurand: I was a little bit of an idiot at that time, so I think at that point, was I doing ceramics? I can't remember. I was running a photography workshop and I was running maybe a drawing workshop and maybe a ceramics workshop, plus the seminars. He was doing the writing, a poetry workshop, I forget. Because I just wanted to do all these different things. I know, we asked the students what they wanted to learn. That was it.

Fiksdal: Always a good idea.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: Then you're really stuck. [laughing]

Aurand: Then you're stuck with teaching six different things.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Aurand: I was running my tail off that program, but it was great. Then I taught with him years later a program on Rumi. It was the ecstatic poems of Rumi, and it was called I Want Burning, which is a line from a Rumi poem, and realized that if you want to have a happy program, make the topic a happy topic. [laughter] We had not a single complainer or whiner or depressed student in the Rumi program. They came in. They were like, I am ready to be ecstatic today. I'm ready to make wonderful, happy art and read ecstatic poetry all day long. [laughing]

Fiksdal: That's just fabulous. I was just listening to a podcast this morning that Rumi was born in, I think, northwestern or northern Afghanistan before he was in Turkey. But back then, there weren't the same borders as today.

The earlier experience with Craig was good, and so you chose to teach again together.

Aurand: Oh, yeah.

Fiksdal: Did he do the same thing? Leave notes every day?

Aurand: No. By then, I got it. What he was trying to do was get me to think a little bit outside my very conservative Ohio upbringing and have a sense of humor, so we had a wonderful time the second time. It didn't bug me, these little notes.

Fiksdal: Do you miss him?

Aurand: I miss him terribly.

Fiksdal: He died.

Aurand: He drowned. He was on vacation with his family in Costa Rica and got out too far swimming, off the beach.

Fiksdal: There was this rumor that he might have killed himself.

Aurand: No.

Fiksdal: It was terrible to think of that.

Aurand: No.

Fiksdal: I'm glad it wasn't true.

Aurand: No

Fiksdal: Were there other memorable programs in those early years?

Aurand: The next year was the first Foundations of Visual Art program, which then became a repeating mainstay program for a while, and then it changed names. But in the visual arts, it was an attempt to just start organizing—that was, I don't know, 1976-77, and people were starting to make noises about, well, how do we build skills in some sequential way? Should we have something that is entry-level in this area, and then a middle thing, and then advanced work? Because at the beginning, nobody worried about, how do you follow up on building skills in a particular discipline?

That was me, Paul Sparks, Stan Klyne, and Phil Harding. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Quite a cast of characters there.

Aurand: Of course, they made me be the coordinator. It's like the woman gets to be the coordinator. That was a crazy program. Paul was great at coming up with these brilliant ideas and then getting me to do the work. He says, "We should have a Beaux Arts ball." Like they did in Paris. "We should have a Beaux Arts ball."

The next thing I know, I'm hiring steel drum bands from Seattle to come down, and we rented the fairgrounds. I'm teaching a printmaking class to make posters. I taught silk screening to make posters. They were making radio spots to publicize. And costumes. On top of all the regular work in the program.

Fiksdal: This wasn't part of the program?

Aurand: It was part of the program. When was it supposed to happen? I think it was in the spring, so we'd done drawing and painting and sculpture and all kinds of stuff. I think it was the last quarter. I hope it was.

Anyway, it was quite the event. It got so well publicized that people came from Vancouver, Canada, and we were turning people away at the door, and I thought, I'm going to jail because we're way over the limit.

It was quite the event, but it was an example of the kind of chutzpah and energy the faculty had in those early years, and the sense that this is part of the educational experience. Let's try it. The whole culture was so much less litigious, so you could try stuff that now you'd go, oh, no, the liability risk on

that is way too great—no, I will not do that. But then it was like, this would be great, and it'll be great for the students. We managed to pull it off and have a great time.

Fiksdal: That is quite a memory. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about Paul Sparks. You taught with him again, or was that the one time?

Aurand: I taught with him again. The second time I taught with him, he was having a very hard time. He was going through a very not-fun divorce, so women were not high on his list. He was very unsupportive. He was demeaning—he would call my teaching into question in front of the students.

Fiksdal: Oh, no.

Aurand: For example, I was teaching the life drawing section, and he'd say, "Who needs to learn life drawing?"

Fiksdal: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

Aurand: It wasn't my teaching. It was just teaching basic drawing. "Well, you don't need to learn basic skills." Dadadadada.

Fiksdal: Which is the foundation, I thought.

Aurand: He also didn't believe. He just needed to do something in art meetings with the arts faculty during that period. If we would debating these different ways of structuring the arts curriculum, and if he proposed an idea and it was recognized as a good idea, he would come around 180 degrees. Then he'd disagreed with it, even though he had proposed it, because he couldn't stand to have people agree with him. He needed to be in attack mode, and he was definitely in attack mode. I've even repressed the name of the program we taught.

Fiksdal: That's fine.

Aurand: But it was one quarter, and after that, I said, "Paul, I love you. I've learned a lot from you. I respect you as an artist. I will never teach with you again." I wrote him an honest evaluation. He was really good with certain students, but I got tired of having young women students come crying after talking to him about wanting to get into his programs, and he would say, "You clearly don't have it."

Fiksdal: He'd have a portfolio review?

Aurand: Yeah, and he'd just tell them that their work was shit.

Fiksdal: Oh, my gawd. I remember him by reputation that he was very difficult, and that young women had difficult with him.

Aurand: Yeah.

Fiksdal: I remember him just being unpleasant in faculty retreats and faculty things as well.

Aurand: Yep.

Fiksdal: And not for good reason. I just don't remember. You talked about how intelligent he was.

Aurand: Oh, yeah, he was brilliant.

Fiksdal: I'm sure he was, but that didn't come across to me.

Aurand: He's a brilliant guy, but he was just so unhappy in himself that he really had to just tear other people's ideas down. It made it very difficult among the Visual Arts faculty to get coordinated and have a direction.

I was the convener of the Visual Arts four or five different times over the years, and there were times when I left meetings in tears after losing it and just yelling at him, because he could blow up a meeting faster than anybody I ever saw.

Fiksdal: That's so difficult. So divisive.

Aurand: Yeah.

Fiksdal: Here we are, trying to collaborate with people that are quite different than us in very many ways.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: But someone who just sabotages, that's really hard to hear. I'm sorry.

Aurand: I think at the beginning, there were many, many strong personalities, especially male faculty.

Fiksdal: Yes, there were.

Aurand: It was mostly male faculty. And it was good and had challenges. They were passionate about their beliefs. The early discussions, all of those early faculty meetings, they were not about budget. They were not about, how do we recruit students? They were about issues of pedagogy and philosophy of education, and what are we really trying to do here? It was wonderful.

People would get up and give these sermons, inspiring sermons, about trying to educate the whole person for a world in which the information is going to change so much that what we need to do is we need to teach them how to learn, and how to take initiative, and how to pull together stuff from different disciplines, because the problems are going to be so complex and multifaceted that if we're just doing blinkered, discipline-focused education, they're going to be lost in the 21st Century, which is true.

Fiksdal: You are such a good person. You went to those faculty meetings.

Aurand: Oh, yeah, they were great.

Fiksdal: I never went because they were 3:00 to 5:00. They were this impossible schedule. I had a child and there's no way I was waiting until 5:30 to pick her up. I just skipped all of them. Didn't go.

Aurand: It was good. I never said anything. I was young, plus shy. Even at Evergreen, there was this sort of hierarchy where the arts are looked down on, so I just stayed in the back and watched, but it was inspiring. Richard Jones would get up and talk.

Fiksdal: When you arrived, I was so excited to meet you because you were a year younger than me. [laughter] I was not the youngest. I was a little sorry to lose that designation, but not entirely. Because when you're young, and both of us just had a master's degree, it meant that people—"people," meaning the men—didn't listen to us, even when we had great ideas.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: Sometimes our ideas would come up again but voiced by a male voice.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: I just remember that time as being so, so difficult. I wonder if you remember some of the women's meetings that we had.

Aurand: Yeah.

Fiksdal: I remember joining seminars, and we read all this women's history and women's literature.

Aurand: I didn't join those. Later, there was a group for women who were past 40—and I thought, well, dang it, I'm not eligible—where they got together and just talked about issues of being a woman faculty and aging—not aging, but getting older, and so on, and had a good time and was mutually supported. But you had to be past 40 to go.

Fiksdal: That's very interesting. I don't remember that at all. Missed it. But in those early years, in the '70s, when there was a Women's Movement going on in the world, that's what I really latched onto, and I remember learning so much.

Aurand: I think I learned it from particular women, from Marilyn and Sally. But again, it was all news to me, coming from the background I had. [laughing] I felt fine about being in a prominent role within the arts, which is why I was coordinator for the whole area a couple times. Then, when the Visual Arts sort of seceded from the rest of the arts—because we had our own issues and building issues to deal with—being the leader for that. I knew the personalities—it was a smaller group—and knew what the issues were.

I don't think I ever spoke up in a larger faculty meeting. But they were great because there was an excitement about it. There wasn't the sense of, oh, everything's in crisis, even though in the '80s, there was a big recession, and the college practically went into financial exigency. Faculty members are standing up and saying, "I'll donate quarters of my pay so we don't have to cut staff."

Partly, it was an issue of scale. The college was small, and everybody could talk to everybody. It was before the union came in, which really, in a damaging way, separated administrators from faculty. Everybody was in the same pot and trusted—they weren't always polite to the deans, but they trusted that the deans were working with them for them, that the provost was. It was like, let's sort this out together. They were not passive about it. It's our college. They knew it was their college.

Fiksdal: You're making me remember that the staff that were hired in those early years were encouraged to teach.

Aurand: Yes.

Fiksdal: We saw them as co-teachers. Some of them had actual classes. Others just taught by mentoring students in whatever their job was. I want to go back to the ceramics studio and ask you, when did that start getting staffed by a staff person, and how did that work out, and how did you connect with them?

Aurand: Oh, gosh.

Fiksdal: Maybe you don't remember all of the details, but I'm wondering, especially when you say the Visual Arts seceded because you had building issues, that the studio space has to be in the mix. The reason I'm asking you this, as you remember, I was Parttime Studies Dean, and it turned into Evening and Weekend Studies.

Aurand: Mm-hm.

Fiksdal: I was always trying to figure out what we should be teaching, and who should be teaching it, and trying to find out from the faculty what they thought.

Aurand: I was still running it, I think, up till about 1979. Then I think it was about then because I wanted to be able to teach other stuff than just ceramics. I think the college had grown enough at that point that we hired—it would have been Mike Moran—to be the technician. That was great because I was off teaching more drawing and painting and 2-D work.

The Leisure Arts thing that had existed at the very beginning of the college—had been an informal ceramics studio where over in what is now the daycare center—it was called the "Messy Arts" Building that people could just go and make pots and stuff like that. They closed that, and there was a lot of demand. Ceramics is always very popular, so they hired a staff person. He was the first—they had the woodshop down in the basement of the library with Doug Hitch running that, and the photo staff, but then the ceramics staff.

Fiksdal: Then we must have gotten a print studio.

Aurand: Yeah, very soon after that. When Lab II was built, it went down in the basement of Lab II.

Fiksdal: Then those staff people taught.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: And this, you saw as a help and not a problem.

Aurand: No, it was great. That whole time of trying to figure out, how are modules—they were first called modules—going to relate to the fulltime curriculum? Do we embed them, and have the staff person teach that as part of the program, or do the staff teach them as separate? There was a real reluctance to start having a second parttime curriculum that students could pick and choose and cobble together something. But it helped. It took off the load. But it did ultimately compete with fulltime programs, for sure.

Fiksdal: I remember that students couldn't get into those classes until they were a senior, and it was so difficult. There was so much demand.

Aurand: Yeah, there was a lot of demand.

Fiksdal: And so sometimes in their last quarter or their last year, they would be taking a lot of art courses, so happily. They could finally get their hands on in those studios.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: The woodshop would only accept 13 students or something? Really hard.

Aurand: Yep.

Fiksdal: Such small spaces, and such dedicated staff. Amazing.

Aurand: Right.

Fiksdal: Thanks, that's great. I wonder if you remember much about Evergreen—that's still in the early years for just a minute more—how it started growing before our eyes?

I remember one time coming out of the Library Building, and there was a lawn that hadn't been there before. [laughing] You were talking about the building of Lab II. Remember just the surroundings?

Fiksdal: That must have been shocking, coming from Ohio State and even from Kalamazoo.

Aurand: Yeah. Ohio State is maybe the biggest undergraduate, or biggest campus. At least it was in the US at that time.

Fiksdal: Oh, I didn't know that.

Aurand: Yeah. I don't think I was as struck by—I was aware that the buildings were being built, and I was involved with the Visual Arts, what was called the VEG—the Visual Environments Group or something—that was trying to get art into buildings and stuff, in advance of the State passing the One Percent for Art law that uses some money, whenever a state building is built, for public art.

We had gotten the college to start setting aside that money when they were building these new buildings. Paul Sparks and I were on that committee together, and we went up and went shopping for art and started Evergreen's art collection. Went around to artists' studios in Seattle and started buying art that is now invaluable. He really knew what he was doing. He bought photographs that are so valuable now, the college can't afford to exhibit them.

I was aware in that sense that things were being built. The COM Building getting built, Lab II getting built. I helped with the design of the Arts Annex. But it was both good and bad. On the good side, we could actually have a space that was designed to make art in. That had sinks that didn't get plugged up, and light. [laughter] It wasn't a converted classroom where you had to suddenly scour everything off the floor at the end of every quarter. Or a converted science lab where you couldn't move the lab tables or something.

That was nice. But the other thing was that suddenly everything's off. You're not seeing things. For example, for many years before, there was a dedicated gallery. We would just have critiques when we were using what are now science rooms and what were just classrooms, we would do our critiques in the lobby of Lab I, because there was a big wall to hang work on. We'd have the class out there, and faculty and other students would have to walk through the space, and they got to see student work.

Fiksdal: I loved it. I would try to go there often.

Aurand: Right. So, people who never otherwise wandered into an art space would suddenly see these weird drawings and these contraptions that students made. I thought it was great because it was hard to get to see what was going on in other programs.

Mainly, as the college grew, it got to be a little harder to have a sense—people started getting more departmental yearnings. Well, we've got one of these and one of these and one of these, but we could use an X to fill out our curriculum. When it was small, you had to teach with somebody outside your discipline because there just weren't that many people. Later, it was just harder to do the mixing to make interdisciplinary programs. I think when Merv Cadwallader first conceptualized doing interdisciplinary teaching, he proposed it only for the upper class.

Fiksdal: Yeah, he never wanted it for the whole college.

Aurand: He never wanted it to be for the whole college. It may have worked better had that been true.

Fiksdal: It was always something that was a dream, in a way. I don't know how much we were able to really do it. In other words, I had to teach French programs in order to be able to hire an adjunct and be able to teach French on several levels. For us, it was interdisciplinary, because it was literature and culture, ethnography, and history. But some people didn't see it that way. They didn't see it as truly

interdisciplinary because it wasn't cross-divisional. When we had Bob Haft teaching with us, then we were including the arts, so that was better. But it was always a big question— what is an interdisciplinary program?

Then, how can you manage to do it with all these students? You get 65, 75 students, with three faculty, and they all are doing French. Only two of us could teach French, so you have to hire someone. And then there were budgetary problems, which have ended up being the demise of long-standing language programs now, as we speak.

Aurand: I'm sorry to hear it.

Fiksdal: Except for perhaps Spanish.

Aurand: Oh, gosh.

Fiksdal: It's really sad. In your perspective, what was going on with interdisciplinary programs? Why do you think creating them got harder?

Aurand: Especially in the early years, and I think up through the '80s, for a long time, I think there were a lot of good interdisciplinary programs. But it really was dependent on the faculty. The sciences are a good example where there are some faculty who've never taught with a non-scientist who have been there decades.

Fiksdal: Oh, really?

Aurand: And have never done a seminar, let alone a faculty seminar, on top of that. They just said, "No, I'm going to teach what I teach." They're good, and it's great that they're doing that, but they just didn't buy in. Compared to somebody like Dharshi Bopegedera. I taught with her three times. We had such a good time. She's teaching next with Martha Rosemeyer in a program on Chemistry and Agriculture. Perfect.

We did the Chemistry of Ceramics. I got back into ceramics at the end. When I taught with Ken Tabbutt, the geologist, I said, "Okay, the earth. We're back in the ceramics studio."

Fiksdal: Very nice.

Aurand: That was good. That was fun. But she really is interested. I was the first person she taught with who wasn't a science faculty, and she had such a good time. But it took her another six or seven years to get a chance—a quarter free—to teach with a non-scientist, because they got so busy making grids. She got locked into teaching chemistry because they have a BS.

It was about that tension, and it's an understandable tension between wanting to provide curriculum for students in a particular area, as opposed to wanting to do the discipline. But there are remarkable people there, like Don Morisato.

Fiksdal: I know him, yes.

Aurand: We taught a program on vision, The Biology of Vision. It was so good. Such a fun program. I had to learn all of the psychology of vision. Why the mind sees what it wants to see. See what it expects to see.

Fiksdal: Because you were teaching it?

Aurand: Yeah, I taught with him. He did the neural pathways, the chemical signaling, and all of that, and I taught drawing, which will teach you about what you're trying to see. I see that thing, but why can't I draw it? It's about how your expectations override what you're actually seeing. Your experience of three-dimensional space prohibits making this thing this odd shape on paper in two dimensions, and all this stuff about illusions. Also, memory, and how that interferes.

He could be a literature faculty. He was almost a literature major. His house is full of books. He reads more than anybody I know, and he always, always does literature in his programs, but the other science faculty, he's sort of isolated from them. Is it okay to talk about faculty like this?

Fiksdal: Absolutely.

Aurand: Okay. I don't want to speak for him, but I think he feels kind of isolated because none of the other science faculty have that. But that's why he came to Evergreen.

Fiksdal: He wanted that interaction with other disciplines.

Aurand: Yeah. He and Bob Haft have taught together a number of times.

Fiksdal: Yeah, I knew that. Bob always thought I should teach with him.

Aurand: Even though neither has a literature degree, they always do a whole bunch of literature in any program that they do, so they get three disciplines going there.

Fiksdal: You have to have seminars, too, and it helps to have literature tying everything together.

Aurand: But you would be surprised at the programs that don't have seminars. [laughing]

Fiksdal: I'm struck by something you said, and that is that you taught something that was new to you, The Psychology of Vision. I think that's all that we did in those early years especially.

Aurand: This is the last program I taught, actually, when I came back after retiring.

Fiksdal: Are there other instances that you remember where you had to suddenly teach something that you didn't know?

Aurand: Yeah, most of them. [laughter] Gosh.

Fiksdal: Teaching literature is unusual, and the French have a particular way of doing that, but you don't usually do it until graduate school.

Aurand: Yes. There were specific skills where I was one chapter ahead of the students. Printmaking, for example, I mentioned, and I'd never had a printmaking class. But I read up on it, went down to the studio, experimented. This works. Okay. Here's the safety things. Here's all that, and it's not that hard.

I was very interested in, as I said earlier in world mythology, and I'd had a little bit of introduction to it. But that became a topic that I read up on and I taught it. Also, the development of consciousness. I taught a program with Beryl Crowe that dealt with that. Theories about that. Theories about the role of art in developing human culture, civilization, consciousness, and so on.

I liked that kind of philosophical inquiry into what happens in the brain. For example, I taught a program with Mark Levinsky where the question was, what can you understand about the experience of someone who lived 14,000 years ago by looking at their art? That was the starting question of the program. [laughing] I became kind of an expert on cave art.

Fiksdal: I remember when you taught that because I had found an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* that I was so excited to share with you because I knew you were teaching that program. I even remember where we were when I shared that, because we used to eat lunch, everyone together, at this what I think ended up being called the "dinosaur table."

Aurand: Yes!

Fiksdal: But I'm not sure it was called that then. I think it was just where we ate lunch. I said I didn't go to faculty meetings, but I learned a lot there. I remember Leo Daugherty telling me, "I've got to go teach." I said, "I thought you had contracts." He said, "I do." And I thought, oh. I saw it more as guiding or pointing things out, not teaching exactly. I knew it was teaching in general, but just the way he said, "I'm going to go teach." [laughing]

I think people helped me a lot by just the way that they talked about teaching. We were passionate about pedagogy.

Aurand: Right. Leo was great. He taught me how to get students out of my office. [laughing] You know, the student who will never leave.

Fiksdal: How did he do it? He stood up from the desk, walked them to the door as he was talking? I think I know that story.

Aurand: With the hand on the shoulder. Which was great for me because I was young and trained in politeness, and I could never—they'd sit there and talk at me for hours and tell me their whole life stories, and I was late.

Fiksdal: They had such problems.

Aurand: They had such problems.

Fiksdal: And that never ended, of course, all those years.

Aurand: Anyway, Leo was great.

Fiksdal: A question that ties in with all of this is, what else did you learn from colleagues? Do you remember specific things that either maybe you avoided doing in your life, or that you chose to adapt?

Aurand: Gosh. I learned everything I know about teaching and most of what I know about art from colleagues. [laughing] I feel so fortunate because they were, some of the times, irascible and sometimes nuts, but brilliant, wonderful people who really cared about education.

I learned specific teaching methods. Here's how to workshop a topic instead of just presenting, or talking at students, here's how to structure the same set of information such that they have to work together to really reinforce what they were learning. In my education, you're competitive with each other. And I just watched people do this amazing teaching and said, oh, okay, that's how you do that. Got it.

Early on, I taught with Marilyn Frasca, who is brilliant. We taught a program called Studio Projects. It was all about the skills. You learn how to draw, and you learn this and you learn this and you get this stuff, and then somewhere—because most of art education in America and at the Beaux Arts, where I went and watched them teach, is that; this assumption that once you have a bunch of skills, you know what you want to do. It's not until you're a senior in college or maybe in graduate school when you're even asked, "What do you want to do?" You're given, here's the next assignment. Now do this to demonstrate you have a mastery of color theory. Do this to demonstrate that you understand perspective.

That's why the majority of students who graduated, even with MFAs, failed to go on be artists. They stop because they haven't been taught how to think about how to connect that skillset to realizing their own imagery, their own interests.

Marilyn started the other way around. She'd say, "What do you want?" And they'd go, "Tell me what to paint." She'd go, "Paint my grandmother," and they'd go, "That's ridiculous." She'd say, "Okay, then what do you want to paint?" [laughter] She'd point out to them that they are the only expert on what they want. She is not the expert on what they want. Then they would have a need to learn a skill, so the urgency of "I need to learn how to make this shadow right," came out because, "I need to make this image that I'm thinking about, this thing."

So, it changed out how to teach. It changed this thing that was in, at least the visual arts, the perennial problem of, how do you build in skills? And made it much more integrated, so even within that one discipline, it meant that if they weren't sure, they started hunting through all of art history until

they found something that resonated; that maybe what they really needed to connect to was Egyptian art of the 4th Century BC, or they needed to find this weird surrealist and they'd go, "That's it! Now I know!"

Fiksdal: You would give them time to search.

Aurand: They would search. And time to develop themes, we did journal writing with them. They were open to that. They were very open. By the end of my teaching, the students weren't.

Fiksdal: They were a different type of student.

Aurand: They were. They knew why they wanted to learn how to do this thing with paint, or that thing in clay. Or that it needed to be done with glass. For me, both for teaching and for my own work in the arts, that was so important to me.

Fiksdal: Yes, it sounds revolutionary.

Aurand: Yeah, it was revolutionary. And that art is just a visualization of all of these ideas that come from all these other areas in life—political ideas, and ideas about what it is to be a human being, and what's the body? Where does the body stop and start? What's our relationship to the natural world? What's our relationship to the invisible? Basically, art is the picture book form of it. [laughing] It's the illustrated version of life.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Aurand: That was great, because then I realized that any discipline, you can connect art to it, because there's going to be a visual history of something.

Fiksdal: That's so interesting. There's some form of art there, even if it's graphs or something.

Aurand: Yeah. One of my post-retirement programs was called Kitchens. Stephanie Kozak asked if we could do a program together, and I said, "Okay, fine." I didn't know her, and I really didn't know what her discipline was. [laughing] I just said, "Okay, fine." She said, "Kitchens," and I thought, okay, now what do I do? But it turns out the representation of food is not just about food. It's this amazing, complex symbolism throughout history where paintings that look like just a picture of a table have all this religious significance. The walnut is Jesus. Oh, my gosh.

Everybody at the time understood that. We look at it and we go, wow, that guy could really paint a walnut. [laughter] They were obsessed with food. No, it's actually this whole allegory about death and resurrection.

Fiksdal: That's fabulous. I was thinking of the Dutch masters.

Aurand: That's 17th Century food painting.

Fiksdal: It just came to me immediately, but then I couldn't come up with a body of work about food after that. Except when you said something about a walnut that I got still lifes in my head.

Aurand: But it goes back to the Greeks and the Romans and everything.

Fiksdal: All the mosaics.

Aurand: Yeah. Turned out, that was another example of having to research this whole new thing. You look back through art history, and instead of looking for the famous, you say, show me all the food pictures, and all the kitchen pictures, and what's that about? It's so interesting.

Fiksdal: It's all on Google now, when you think about that.

Aurand: Yeah.

Fiksdal: We couldn't have done it earlier in our teaching.

Aurand: It was a lot harder.

Fiksdal: We have a great library. An amazing library. But still, that would have been work. Okay, let's stop for now.