

Barbara Leigh Smith
Interviewed by Nancy Taylor
The Evergreen State College oral history project
October 12, 2017
FINAL

Begin Part 1 of 2 of Barbara Leigh Smith on 10-12-17

Taylor: This is our first interview, on October 12, [2017]. This is Nancy Taylor, and I'm interviewing Barbara Leigh Smith, who came to the college, I think, in 1978 in the spring?

Smith: That's right.

Taylor: And has a lot of stories to tell. She was there—well, you're still there, basically. To start with, we need a little background. Can you talk a bit about your growing up—your parents, your community, sort of formative years, stepping stones and turning points?

Smith: Okay. I was born at the Naval Base in Vallejo, California, during World War II. My dad was in the Navy, and their home, though, was in Wisconsin, and I grew up almost my entire life in Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where his family had lived for two or three generations.

My family was, I'd say, upper middle class—my husband would say higher—but, four generations back were college graduates—engineers, lawyers, inventors. So, for me, school was a straight track into college. Never even discussed an option of anything but going to college, and that was just how it was.

The turning point, for me, in college, was graduate school. I was a good student throughout school, and I liked school. But I didn't really get on fire about it until graduate school.

Taylor: Do you want to skip all the way to that? You don't want to tell any more stories about early years? [laughter]

Smith: Early years. I grew up in a white, middle-class community. Good schools. Everybody went to school.

Taylor: Can you remember a teacher that sort of made a difference?

Smith: I had a number of good teachers, and a couple bad teachers, and I can remember both of those, actually. The teachers that really stood out, actually, were more in high school. I can't remember much about K—8. But I had fabulous social studies teachers and English teachers, in particular, in high school.

They were really motivating. I had two teachers who came to school drunk that really turned me off on them. [laughter] I went to three different high schools.

Taylor: Can you remember when you decided that education was the direction you were going to go?

Smith: It was almost an accident. After high school, I looked only at small liberal arts colleges in the Midwest. It never occurred to look outside the Midwest or at bigger colleges.

Taylor: This was in the late '60s?

Smith: This was in the '60s, early '60s—'62. I applied to Lawrence University, Beloit College, Lake Forrester College and Ripon College-- all small, very similar liberal arts colleges. I chose Lawrence because the train went there. Lawrence had a prescribed curriculum for freshmen called Freshmen Studies, and we had to take two semesters of it. It had rotating teachers, so for half of one semester, you had one teacher, and then the second half of the semester, you had a different teacher. The curriculum was Great Books that included like the Bible; Heisenberg's uncertainty principle; *Who Governs?*, (Robert Dahl, 1961)—a classic in political science; poetry. It was all over the place. One of the teachers was a P.E. teacher, which seemed a little strange. I don't remember who the next one was, but they were very variable, because they were from all different disciplines. But it was good, and it opened my mind to fields I never would have considered.

I still remember the first paper we wrote. I had an English teacher that taught that part of that course, and he gave everyone a D.

Taylor: Just as a matter of principle?

Smith: Yes. So, I went into his office and started to cry, and said I was going to drop out of school because I didn't want to waste my parents' money. He calmed me down and said, "This was just sort of to get everybody inspired to jump much higher than they ever thought they could." And he was right; it all turned out fine. But I still think that was a very ineffective approach to new students, in particular. It's very traumatic, that first year. Living in the dorm was traumatic. Everybody lived on campus.

I was at Lawrence for two years, and started out as a history major. But it was a very small school, and really, there was only one American history teacher. So, when I got into the third semester with him, it started to feel the same, so I switched to political science, and they had really good faculty in that area.

But, when my parents didn't like my boyfriend at that time, they suggested I go to school in England. So, I took my junior year in England at Leicester University. It's a three-year degree there, and it's specialized. It's not like Gen Ed in the U.S. I took the first year sociology sequence, and the second-

and third-year political science courses. They were mostly seminar-style, except for the Intro to Sociology, which was like a big lecture.

It was really different. There was no prescribed textbook. You were given an enormous, huge reading list and not much direction; a lot of freedom to choose what to read and what to emphasize. The real exam was at the end of the year, when we were all herded into a huge auditorium and given a test that lasted all day; an essay test, with people from all the different fields in chairs next to you.

Taylor: The exam wasn't set by your teachers.

Smith: I don't know how it was set, but it was essays. There were proctors sitting on very tall stools. The questions were pretty easy for me, because they were things like, what are the different views about human nature? So, all of the stuff I'd done at Lawrence kind of flowed into that, and the freshman studies paid off. [laughing] I got high honors in one of the subjects, so that was good, but a whole different way of learning.

The out-of-class experience there was very important, too. I had a couple of roommates, and they had very different life experiences. That was during the startup of the Vietnam War.

The other thing that really just struck me was how visible class differences were in England, and how naïve I was about how the U.S. was seen abroad, because there was a lot of talk about civil rights, and what was happening in the U.S., and Vietnam. It wasn't even in my frame of mind at that point. It was too early. When I came home, I had one year left. There was no direction in colleges at that point about life after college, or jobs or any of those things, so I was pretty confused. I applied to law school, because that seemed like a logical alternative, and I applied to Aetna Insurance, and I applied to the Foreign Service and the CIA. I got several of those options, and was accepted at Northwestern Law School, among others. But it was terrifying that there were like 200 men and 11 women being admitted.

I actually took the political science option and went to the University of Oregon, because that was a place I really loved, from having visited my relatives, who lived in Tacoma. Went there thinking I'd do international relations, and then I learned you have to become proficient in a foreign language. That wasn't my cup of tea! [laughter] And it just wasn't kind of what I expected, because we were reading the same books I'd read the previous year at Lawrence. I mean, literally the same books. Now, I can understand why that happened, but it didn't feel like a good investment.

I decided I'd take time off, and I moved to Washington, D.C. and went to work at American University at a think tank that was based there, the Center for Research in Social Systems. They were doing Department of Defense work, and they hired me as the lowly little data gatherer and statistician. They had two big projects I was working on. One was studying urban riots, mostly reading newspapers

and coding data. The other was looking at the roots of insurgencies in Latin America, and effective counterinsurgency strategies.

Taylor: Do you think part of the reason you got the job was that there were openings for women at that time?

Smith: No, I never thought about that. But it also became very clear quickly that you had to have a master's degree to go anywhere.

Taylor: So, that sent you back to school?

Smith: That sent me back to school. But I had about six, seven months in D.C., and that was interesting.

Taylor: Who was President?

Smith: It was '66-'67, that period.

Taylor: That's LBJ.

Smith: Yeah.

Taylor: Right at the height of Vietnam.

Smith: Right. I went back to Oregon, and that seemed fine, and I didn't have to do international relations [laughing] and study a foreign language. But there was a broader range of political science, and I just sort of took advantage of what was there. I was hired as one of four research assistants for a faculty member who had big grants to do voting studies. There was a little group of us in a nice, old building. We had stipends, and friendship circles and a lot of stimulation from each other, and from the projects that we were doing.

Political science then was really different. It wasn't firmly rooted in just political science. That department, in particular, was young, in terms of the faculty, and a lot of them were exploring linkages between economics and political science, history and political science, philosophy, psychology. I think at that point, I developed roots that were much more interdisciplinary than they were disciplinary, in that sense. And that debate that was going on nationally about behaviorism versus other approaches was not the big deal there, it was more about political economy, political behavior. Lots of kind of wide-ranging experimenting, which was fascinating.

I wasn't sure where that was going to go. The few visions I'd had about being a teacher were like "Me? A teacher? That seems way too scary and public." But I just sort of slipped into it. [laughing] Because everybody there was going to be a teacher, as it turned out. [laughing] The longer you were there, the more likely that was, and the more comfortable it became.

Taylor: You look back on it now, and you can see where your ideas about interdisciplinary studies, for one thing, started; the interconnection of knowledge?

Smith: Yeah, that really started at Oregon. When it got towards the end of my degree, I applied to lots of different schools, and got interviews at lots of different schools. My interest was more geographic, I'd have to say. I got an interview at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland, and at the University of Houston, and at Cal State Long Beach.

Taylor: This was to be faculty in the political science department?

Smith: Yes. And none of those were interesting to me, and it had nothing to do with the departments.

Taylor: It had to do with the location.

Smith: Yeah. I've always been drawn back to this part of the country.

Taylor: What did you do?

Smith: I turned all those down, and I went back to Lawrence. They hired me back as one of their graduates who had become a faculty. They had a visiting position, so I went back and taught there for two years. That's where I met David. He was there in a visiting position, too. There were only like three unmarried people in the whole faculty, so it was kind of inevitable. [laughter]

Taylor: Fate!

Smith: It did turn out, yeah. But Lawrence was interesting, to be on the other side. Students are different than teachers. [laughing] But it was very accommodating with kind of emerging interests, and the students were very easy to work with, compared to the students you see today. They could write well, they were good students, they were obedient, they did their work.

Taylor: They were students like you.

Smith: They were students like me. Exactly. Lawrence was also the roots of my interest in social justice. When I'd been a student there was when the Woolworth's challenges were happening all over the South and people were doing sit-ins. We did one in Appleton during that time at Lawrence. And Appleton, Wisconsin, where it was located, was the home of Joseph McCarthy!

Smith: Yeah. I went back to Lawrence for my first teaching job but David and I both wanted to be out here. He'd been teaching at Reed before, and he wanted to come back to the West Coast. We decided, well, we're teachers, so we should just spend our summers on the West Coast. So we came out here, and we rented a place on Vashon Island in 1971. We drove all around the Olympic Peninsula and Mount Rainier, looking for property, thinking we could buy a piece of land and build a little cabin and come in the summers. So, that's how we purchased this property. We bought this land, and then, for the next many years, we hauled our horses and our dogs and our cats and our baby out here from other places where we were working.

After Lawrence, I got hired at the University of Nebraska. David eventually got a job—it was pretty soon after—at the University of Nebraska Omaha. That was a commutable distance, so we lived in Lincoln. He worked up there in the Goodrich Scholarship program, which was for inner-city black youth mostly. It was a gen ed program, actually.

Taylor: That's where you met Gail [Trembley], I'll bet.

Smith: Yes, Gail was in that, too. Those were good days. That was a really strong department. There was really nothing else to do there, so the social connections, the personal relations, were really strong. It's also generational; we were all kind of the same age at that point, and our dating cards weren't all full, like they are when you move into a very established place. So, we developed lots of close friendships.

Taylor: What courses were you teaching?

Smith: I taught pretty conventional courses. I taught Political Behavior; Scope and Methods—which was the philosophy class; Political Parties. Everybody taught Intro to American Government to mob classes of 75 to 100 people. They had a graduate program, too, so there was some of that. I taught Political Research Methods.

Those were good years. Then, I became the departmental advisor, which was kind of interesting to get to know students more intimately there. At most universities, you were teaching a mix of force-feeding courses to students who had to take it because it was required, but they weren't majors or anything, and then you got some students who were majors who had a different level of sophistication and interest.

We got to know some people in some of the other disciplines, but the departments were pretty siloed. Political science was one whole floor of a giant building, and sociology was three floors down. There really weren't ways to get to know other people, except by hanging out at a local bar, or, you know.

Taylor: This job that you had as department advisor, was that a link towards doing administration?

Smith: I think so. I don't even remember how this happened, but they established a residential college there in the early '70s, called the Centennial Education Program, which was based in one of the dorms. That was kind of a movement in that period. I applied to be the Director, and I got appointed the Director. We had classes in the dorms, and it was an alternative gen ed program, basically.

Taylor: So that's what was going on—Hampshire, Santa Cruz—that's part of the same movement.

Smith: Yes, so that's when I really got into alternative education. I started reading about it, and getting to know other places like Centennial, and seeing different ways to do things. We could do almost

anything. We had this old lady there who, God, she must have been 85. She taught in the program, and her passion was serving people, especially incarcerated students. I wrote some grants, and we hired a mural artist from Mexico, who worked then in Chicago.

He came and we did three mural projects. We did one in nursing homes, and that was done with shadow murals, where they'd have people in wheelchairs against a wall with the lights adjusted, and then they'd go around their bodies to outline the body, and then they'd paint things. We did one at the maximum-security prison that the prisoners did of their lives, which went on tour all over the state when it was done. We did a Hispanic mural, too, in that community. They got in big arguments because whole families came and did it, and the youth wanted to make Cesar Chavez bigger than the Virgin Mary, so that became an intergenerational issue. It was very fun to do that. It was easy to get money, and I could bring in all these cool people, so that just got me more and more interested in that.

In the meantime, David and I had been looking for ways to come west. We decided, during my second year at Centennial, to really look. We started watching, looking for jobs, and this one year—1977, I guess—there were a bunch that opened up here that I knew nothing about, but I applied anyway. One was at the Council for Post-Secondary Education, one was a deanship at Seattle U., and the other was the Evergreen job. So, I applied for all of them.

Taylor: What a different life you would have led.

Smith: Yeah. So, that's how I got here. And the funny thing was that started me deeper on a path of the theory behind Evergreen and the larger alternative college movement.

Taylor: So, before these openings were announced, had you read about Evergreen? Did you know anything about it?

Smith: Nothing. When I came here, I started to learn a lot about it though. I got really interested in where this came from? The formative event for me was this meeting in Spokane. I don't remember what the meeting was, but I was in Spokane—it was my first year here—and all these old doogies were there. One guy came up and he said he was on the founding committee in the Legislature that started Evergreen.

Taylor: I know who that was. Senator Sandison?

Smith: Yes. He said, "We really hoped that college would be a beacon of innovation for the whole state and it hasn't been." "It's like you have a castle, and you pulled up the drawbridge, and you just kind of receded into yourself." And I never forgot that.

Taylor: That was a good message, actually.

Smith: And I said to him, “Well, you know, we’re struggling to survive. We’re under attack all the time now. But I’ll remember that. And I did. [laughing] That stuck with me forever, and that was the seedbed for several books and the conferences I developed and the Washington Center, and the whole export-what-works motivation.

But it also became really clear that progressive colleges are very insular, and resistant to change. Both those impulses drive me, because I think Evergreen tends to be insular.

Taylor: It does.

Smith: And it’s bad.

Taylor: I think, at the beginning, the only outreach that was even acknowledged [chuckles] was in the first class, probably the biggest cohort of all the students were faculty brats. They were children of faculty, and the faculty learned about the college for their kids.

Smith: Right.

Taylor: That was the reason, because the kids were rebels, and they wanted to go somewhere. We would get calls from parents that were faculty somewhere. There was a reach out in the state to get students, but beyond that . . . and as educational leaders, I think, people at the college felt they were, but they weren’t doing anything about it. You were really the first.

Smith: When I was hired, I was so naïve—I would have come for no money—when they called and offered me the job, I didn’t ask about that. But the college was supposed to have 2,400 students, and it had less than 1,900. So, there were massive budget cuts, and I was supposed to deal with getting rid of all the staff.

Taylor: Did you have budgetary experience?

Smith: I’d managed \$2,000 at the Centennial Program. [laughing] Fortunately, you had a very savvy VP for Finance here, Dean Clabaugh, and he knew exactly what was coming. So, he immediately put in an assistant in my office, [Dan Weiss], who was a budget master.

Taylor: So he knew that you didn’t know.

Smith: Absolutely. But he knew the whole college was incompetent in lots of ways, and he was always saving it.

Taylor: But he didn’t have anything to do with hiring you?

Smith: No.

Taylor: When you were hired, was there an interest in innovative education, and what you thought of it, and what your philosophy was?

Smith: A little.

Taylor: I'm really interested in the story, because you crossed a barrier that was really significant. Because, up until the time you were hired, deans were to come from inside the college.

Smith: Right.

Taylor: And it was a big scandal when you were hired. People were divided, and said, "How dare they go outside? Does that mean there aren't people inside?" There were people inside that applied that didn't get the job.

Smith: Oh, I didn't know that.

Taylor: So, I assumed that you had a lot of budget experience. But you didn't.

Smith: No, none.

Taylor: It might have been the case that there was a desire, among some people, that wanted some new blood.

Smith: Yeah. Well, I thought it was the Trustees. I've only heard one side of the story. I was told that there was big administrative disaster . . .

Taylor: There was.

Smith: . . . and the Board reorganized the deans, setting up the senior dean/baby dean structure, because the deans needed supervision within their own organization.

Taylor: I think it was beyond that. It wasn't just the deans, it was higher. Because, at that point, they fired two—well, it was too administrative-heavy in terms of salary, and the Legislature, I think, in about 1974, cut the budget significantly, and we didn't have the students.

Smith: That was when we had four VPs and stuff.

Taylor: It was just administratively too much, and so there was a complete reorganization.

Smith: Right.

Taylor: I think, at that point, it worked down to the deans, but it started with the top.

Smith: The original plans had the college scaled at 15,000.

Taylor: Yeah, 1,000 a year.

Smith: So that just was unrealistic.

Taylor: It was unrealistic to think that we could do it, but it was also unrealistic because it was at the same time that they had the sign in Seattle, "Would the last person that leaves the city please turn out the light?" So, we weren't going to have the students, under any circumstance.

Smith: Right. And it was completely naïve about what the kind of college it was, could ever be. This is a huge college now, for the kind of college it is.

Taylor: Yeah. I can remember wondering how you would hire 50 faculty a year that would be suitable, and willing, and enthusiastic about doing this work.

Smith: . . . that could be done, but not the way we do it. [laughing]

Taylor: And you'd have to support huge faculty development, which we should have anyway.

Smith: Right. But the other thing that I was told is that the deans were fighting, and two of them had moved out of the building.

Taylor: That's right.

Smith: And there was a disconnect over critical things, like hiring. They'd let a whole bunch of contracts out to people that exceeded the budget, and they had to try to rescind them—some of which they did, and some of which they didn't.

Taylor: You came into that hornet's nest.

Smith: Yeah, but I didn't really realize that. The advantage of being an outsider, from the beginning to the end, really, is that you're more distant from stuff, and you're not tied up in alliances with individuals that are historical.

Taylor: So, you think that was already set, that you're always going to be considered an outsider?

Smith: In a way; in a way not. I mean, in a way, I think our views get set pretty early when we join an organization, and that becomes the glasses through which you see things.

Taylor: Describe that community that you saw when you came in 1978.

Smith: What I saw then looks really different now. I think we evaluate things based on comparisons, and when I joined the deans' team, first of all, I moved into Sandra Simon's office because she was on leave. You could see what that means without me even saying anything. [laughter] Like, there's her basket of eggs, whatever. Willie Parson was the person that I was replacing. We talked briefly, but I wouldn't call it orientation or transition planning. Will Humphreys was the other senior dean, and the two junior deans were Rob Knapp and Bill Winden.

Taylor: Lynn De Danaan (then Lynn Patterson) was not dean anymore.

Smith: She was gone. I still remember those first deans' meetings, and sitting in a particular table in a particular room. It was like being in a hornet's nest, because there's all this stuff coming at you, and you don't understand the context or anything. It's pretty overwhelming.

I remember a couple things. One is about dysfunction, because the first thing that hit me was all this news about all the places that I had to monitor. I was told that Gordon Beck had gone to Italy with students and lost the cameras. Then I was told Pete Taylor was out in Puget Sound with the Boston whaler, and they forgot to tighten down the screws, and the motor dropped to the bottom of Puget

Sound. [laughter] I could tell you 12 other stories like that happened in the first seven months, and I'm going, "Really? What am I supposed to do about it?" There was just an onslaught.

Probably the peak was when Steve Herman came in with a wheelbarrow to my office, and dumped dozens of frozen birds on my desk, and screamed about how somebody pulled the plug on the freezer in the lab, and thawed the birds. [laughing]

Taylor: Was this just people doing their own thing, and were there just no policies?

Smith: There were some policies about how faculty had to repay things in such circumstances, but no one ever enforced any of those.

Taylor: When you came, were you excited about possibilities? What good did you see, or what exciting things did you see?

Smith: That was kind of the other side of it. That was just the stuff about my little job, and that isn't exciting. [laughing]

Taylor: That was cleaning up.

Smith: Right. And there was a lot to clean up, and Evergreen was in the newspaper all the time about missing media equipment. But what was exciting was the people. Rob Knapp and Bill Winden and Will were fabulous mentors. Rob, in particular. They had a very clear agenda on how to orient new people, and we don't do it anymore, and I think that's a mistake, although at the time, I thought, Why am I doing this?

Because the first thing they did was say, "You have to teach in a program all spring quarter." And I go, "Why? I was hired as a dean."

Taylor: We did that for a long time, even with the President.

Smith: I know. We should have continued it.

Taylor: In fact, I told George Bridges that that's what he should do.

Smith: That's what I told him, too. Anyway, I was assigned to Voices of the Third World, with York Wong and Rainer Hasenstab and Peter Elbow. It turned out York was going to be a dean with me subsequently, some years later, so that was cool. Peter Elbow just blew me away, not because he was a wonderful teacher, but because of his whole thing about writing. That opened a whole new door for me.

Taylor: That was a significant experience?

Smith: Very much so, yeah, just seeing it, and watching how they interacted. They were very caring.

Taylor: You weren't just an observer showing up once in a while.

Smith: No. I wasn't there every second, but I was there a lot of the time. The other thing that happened was Rob Knapp just took me under his wing, and he hauled me around to all his evaluation conferences. They were all staged, I just couldn't believe it. Like he'd go to someone's office, and he'd bring some banana bread or coffee, and then they'd have this wonderful, generative conversation. Very authentic. Dean—faculty. I learned how to do evaluations, and that they weren't punitive, and they weren't picky, but they were generative explorations. That really blew me away. You really started to see, wow, something cool is here, and these people were really clear.

Taylor: And your cleanup job was in order to allow that to happen.

Smith: Yeah. [laughing] The other hard part of—now, it looks like it has two sides to it that first year, because the other upside was Dan Evans was there then, and Byron [Youtz] was the Provost. Those guys were complete pros, and very supportive.

Taylor: And very simpatico, the two of them. That was sort of a miracle, because they both knew what they were good at, and they were really good at it.

Smith: Yeah. I still don't know if this is true, but I think Dan planted the Evergreen study at the Council on Post-Secondary Education. They wrote a report on Evergreen: "How can this school be successful?" And it had 25 recommendations that were not negotiable. That became our master plan for the next six years. We got past endlessly deferring decisions.

Taylor: When Dan was appointed—which was a little bit of a scandal in itself, because you came back from Christmas vacation and there he was. It was quite funny, in a way, because people, in typical Evergreen or State of Washington/Seattle politics, process is all around here. And people were furious at the process. But they would say, "Do you approve of who got the job?" "Yeah, he's fine. He's good. We're glad." But they hated the idea of how it happened. But they got over that pretty fast, I think.

Smith: Yeah.

Taylor: The other thing, Dan Evans had tremendous stature in the State, so just at the time that we needed that, because we were in trouble—

Smith: He created huge cognitive dissonance within people's minds about, well, I hate Evergreen, but he's there? Something else must be going on here.

Taylor: He was tremendously loyal, and helpful that way. He could mouth the words, and Byron had Dan Evans's complete support. I can remember turning a corner there. But without those two . . .

Smith: . . . the place would have gone under.

Taylor: I think it would have gone under, and people were pretty aware of that. That was when Pete Sinclair and Richard Jones were teaching a program on poetry, and it became a joke in the Legislature.

Smith: Really?

Taylor: But there was a wonderful guy from Western who stood up for us in the Legislature. But, you were a budget dean. What did you do?

Smith: The harder part of the cleanup side was we had to cut the budget hundreds of thousands of dollars. We were within one faculty line of a reduction in force, but we had so many people on leave without pay, and so many people who'd taken leave without pay interminably, and still hadn't come back, that we didn't have to invoke that. Carrie Cable had been gone.

And there was Matt Halfant. Anyway, there were a bunch of people, and finally, after we recovered, we said, "You've got to fish or cut bait." Because they'd been gone for about five years, and they wanted us to hold the positions.

Taylor: We don't have that kind of allowance now at all.

Smith: No, we don't. But I had to fire a whole bunch of people, and that didn't help.

Taylor: What was that experience like. I don't remember disaster in that score. I do remember people being offered a job, and then ending up not getting it, and our being legally in trouble.

Smith: There was a whole bunch of staff people eliminated, like Jerry Cook. And he had all these friendships in the science faculty, so that was very hard. The staff was overbuilt at that point, still.

Taylor: What about faculty lines?

Smith: There were no faculty lines eliminated. But, in the next five years, there was a bunch of people that left.

Taylor: And no new hires for a while.

Smith: Right.

Taylor: You were the budget dean for . . .

Smith: . . . two years. Then Will stepped down, so I asked Byron if I could be the Curriculum Dean, and it was much more fun. [laughing]

Taylor: Where were your offices?

Smith: They were where the grants office is now, those four big classrooms that are right on the second floor across from the galleries.

Taylor: Then you eventually just moved down to the end of the hall?

Smith: Yeah. I went back to writing grants, because I thought that's what deans did, although nobody ever said it was my job, but there had been big grants. When I looked at the history of Evergreen, there were a bunch of cool grants. There was the "Each One Teach One" thing, with Lilly and the Danforth Visitor.

Taylor: I always thought the Danforth one was wonderful. Did Peter Elbow write that one?

Smith: I don't know. It was before I came, but then I stole those ideas and tried to enact them.

Taylor: I think Rob Knapp might have written the "Each One Teach One."

Smith: And then, there was a huge NSF RULE grant that started the SPLU (Self Paced Learning) Lab.

I wrote one to NEH. It was when they were funding "Writing Across the Curriculum," and that went for three years, and also involved working with UPS and PLU and UW and their writing people. Writing has always been a center of my approach to faculty development, so that was neat. There's five monographs we produced on that that are in the Archives that are wonderful.

Taylor: Leo's Daugherty was one of them?

Smith: Yeah, where he interviewed everybody, which is priceless.

Taylor: That was super. He was also a terrific writing teacher.

Smith: He was. There were a couple people in those early days who just reached out to me. Leo was one of them, and Phil Harding was one of them, and Bill Aldridge. What a spectrum! [laughing] But they all just said, "Let's go have some lunch," or, "Let's drive to the beach." That was great.

Taylor: That's a good story, because the opposite story is that the old-timers were so cliquish, they didn't invite anybody new into the group. I never felt that was true.

Smith: That's because you were in the group. [laughing]

Taylor: I was in the group, yeah.

Smith: I never thought there was the "the" group, though, either. There was more than one group. I had horses, so I had a natural group, and my horse lived with Sandra Simon, so I knew that group in a whole different way.

Taylor: And you got involved with York, and horses there.

Smith: Yeah, and Jeanne Hahn, through being a dean. It became more and more obvious, the older I've gotten, that it's all about relationships. It's not even about substance of what you do, but one little touch with somebody and their interests—whew!—a world of difference.

Taylor: But one of the early criticisms—I don't know if you've read the M 'n M Manifesto recently?

Smith: Yes.

Taylor: It got cultish, it got cliquish. Not old-timers necessarily, but groups.

Smith: It very clearly was that. There was this humanities group, and there was Beryl Crowe's group. Scientists always felt like they were being assaulted by the humanities and vice versa.

Taylor: I don't know if that's still the way or not.

Smith: I don't know anything about the current situation. There was a bunch of people that weren't in any of the groups, and did great work, like Stephanie Coontz. She showed elastic the boundaries are at Evergreen, where you can do really good work, and do something completely different, like become a famous scholar [chuckles] and still do your job well.

But I learned a lot of that just through the evaluation process. Half our time was spent doing classroom visits and evaluations.

Taylor: As deans.

Smith: Yeah. We had 37 people in each dean's group when I came. Every single one got a class visit—at least one—and a full evaluation conference that took half the day.

Taylor: And a written evaluation.

Smith: Yeah.

Taylor: What did you think of the whole evaluation system? You evaluated the person above you, and you evaluated the person below you, and you evaluated across. I have like 30 feet of evaluations.

Smith: I bet you do. I burned a bunch of mine. But I thought it was fantastic. It was mostly validation and community building is what I thought of it. It was key to being the Curriculum Dean, because that's how I did matchmaking of teams. That's completely gone, and that's a big problem, I think.

Taylor: That was one of my questions. I was going to ask you, how did you do the teambuilding? There's a whole area that I picture you in, and it has to do with community building, it has to do with retreats, and with curriculum meetings, and with getting people together, and with really supporting learning communities. There's that whole part of your life.

Smith: That's my life.

Taylor: Talk for a bit about how you made teams, and how you made that happen.

Smith: Some of it is scale. You have to be in the right position to be a matchmaker, first of all, and you have to know people enough to actually make things happen. Then, creating events. I learned that during those first years, because retreats happened everywhere.

Taylor: Because people were doing it.

Smith: I just saw it. And deans' groups were functional. People always wanted more out of them than they got, but they did somewhat work. There were groups that were loosely tied to the curriculum. There were also groups that wanted nothing to do with continuity, but there were quite a number of groups that had something in mind, and keeping that going.

Then there were key people that I knew, like Sally Cloninger, who were leaders of some of the subgroups, and just fascinating people that people wanted to be around, because they were fun. So, we

started like the Wild Water Women who rafted the Rogue and other rivers. We later called ourselves the Womens Terrorist Society and the Chief of Police went to Dan Evans when he heard about this. Dan laughed. We had lots of retreats. I remember one at Harrison Hot Springs in Canada. We called Dan on the phone with all kinds of silly ideas. Then when we were coming home the customs guy at the border came up, all serious, and said our president had left a message with our pink slips.

Taylor: But you were much more in the center of curriculum making than deans, or anybody is now.

Smith: That's right.

Taylor: It partly has to do with your personality, but it also had to do with the structure.

Smith: Yes and size

Taylor: Because once you set up planning units, and once you have curriculum being made on the individual level, you don't have anybody seeing the big picture.

Smith: Right. One of the big changes was when I was the Curriculum Dean, I was in charge of full-time/part-time, faculty hiring, faculty development. They were all together. Now, they're all split, because each has become kind of its own little empire.

Taylor: How much of your time do you think you spent in your office, or with groups of people and a Board there that said, "Well, how about putting these people together? Let's get these people together."

Smith: No, I didn't do it that way. It was more through the evaluation conferences.

Taylor: But you must have called up somebody and said, "I think you might like to do this," or something.

Smith: Yeah, or I'd say, "We need so many positions here." We had a pretty fixed idea where the students were, and that was partly because we were bouncing back from what we didn't want to be. When I came, half the enrollment was in individual contracts, and we decided—we were actually under a court order about that; they were auditing us for quality reasons—we completely backed away from that, and decided that was a mixed message to the public about what the college's core values were. So, we made the individual contract pool purposefully tiny, and clamped down on the biggest program individual contract pool, which was Native Studies.

Taylor: Was that your role, as Curriculum Dean, to do it, or did you do it with Byron?

Smith: Yeah, everybody was in the same place about that. Now, they're kind of back to the same thing, except it's one-person programs. But you've got to monitor things or they just go any which way.

Taylor: Right.

Smith: People don't see the big picture, even of their individual decisions.

Taylor: I can remember that change happening when faculty would just say, “Well, I’ll do this.” There was nobody sort of saying, “Well, we need these big teams, or these things, and you might like to do this.” It was individual faculty just saying, “Well, I’ll do this,” or three faculty saying, “I’ll do this.” There was no leadership from above.

Smith: The other thing that happened at the same time was the mismatch between what the students wanted, and the faculty profile. So, we started to control the distribution, more through the hiring process, at the same time. So, I think there was a whole bunch of things that needed to be aligned. That’s still a problem, but it’s not as serious a problem as it used to be, because now we’ve got a healthy part-time studies program. Health and Human Behavior was one of the signature things that we could never taff. Management in the Public Interest was the other one.

Taylor: When you first came, was that the beginning of part-time studies?

Smith: There was a little tiny piece of part-time that started earlier. The first job I was given, curriculum-wise, was to build summer school. What I did was I went to the National Summer School Conference, and figured out how others did it.

Taylor: Was that our first summer school?

Smith: No. When I came, the catalog wasn’t even printed until the students arrived on the fall. There were a whole bunch of things that were wrong about how the systems were set up.

Taylor: That changed when Dan Evans came.

Smith: Yes.

Taylor: When the college started, we created the curriculum in the spring. There was a catalog that was very general that went out in the fall. In the spring, we figured it out and that was announced when the students arrived—or, when the students were going to register, I guess. That only lasted, I think, four or five years.

Smith: That’s a long time for a college that’s trying to grow. [laughing]

Taylor: Yeah, yeah. But I think it was also a college trying to figure out what it was doing.

Smith: Yeah, and very little accountability, actually.

Taylor: So, there was this faith that if you get students that were willing to just take the risk, the programs were broadly enough designed that the students wouldn’t be pigeonholed into doing something they didn’t want to do, because there was enough. There was the breadth.

Smith: Right.

Taylor: Were you part of the—it might have been a Rob Knapp design—where the balloon . . .

Smith: . . . Trial Balloon. Yes, that was around then. It's come back now. They've been doing it again. But I don't think that was ever very successful, because students often—I mean, SOS has become a better form of students getting to design things—Student-Originated Studies. I actually read the Trial Balloon recently. It was on the walls when Zimmerman was here. Not that helpful. Yeah, and one of the big issues is, what do people want that aren't here? The problem is that they have narrow definitions of what they think it is. I think that we thought that it was infinitely negotiable, when, in fact, it isn't, especially when they go get a job. [laughing] This is kind of a backward twist, but the other thing that was very surprising is—the first retreat I went to, I was in charge of organizing. It was at Fort Flagler. I was told there was no money, so I had to really do it frugally. I ordered stuff like hot macaroni and cheese, and then everybody bitched about the quality of the food. John Aiken's dog walked through the Jell-o on the table with his paws. [Laughter] I still remember, we were playing volleyball at one point, and Clabaugh was on the edge, and as I completely did terrible playing, he said, "Well, I hope you're better at managing the budget than playing volleyball." [laughing]

Taylor: That was very early?

Smith: Yes. And then, Richard Jones got up and did his lecture on Four. Marching back and forth. "Four, four, four." I saw him and thought, I've got to get to know him. He seems like he's got a lot of allies here, and he knows stuff. One of the first things I did was to reach out to him. We co-designed a National Alternative Education Conference at Evergreen, where we brought all these other schools to Evergreen, like Antioch, and places like that.

Taylor: This was about '79?

Smith: Yeah, so then we wrote this book together. After that, John McCann and I wrote another book, which is the second volume of that.

Taylor: *Reinventing Ourselves*.

Smith: Yes, but this is the update of what's happened to the alternative colleges. I just kept getting deeper and deeper and deeper then into alternative colleges.

Taylor: In so many ways, your development was organic.

Smith: Yes.

Taylor: You didn't come here with a mission, or a crusade. You came here with an open mind.

Smith: No, but I developed a crusade! [laughing] Well, here's the real twist. Turns out—and I didn't know this until I came here—my family has roots in all this stuff. There's kind of two sides to the family. One is the capitalist side, which I was the product of. My dad was the president of a company that had

existed through three generations of the family. He had eight brothers and sisters, and all the men became like the capitalist side. All the women became socialists.

Taylor: And educators.

Smith: And married black people in the '60s. One of them married the man who was in the [Alexander] Meiklejohn original [experimental] college. He became the head of the Communist Party in Wisconsin. So, once I started reading the history of the family—there's a big, fat book; I gave all these books to the Archives—there's a big history of the University of Wisconsin, and there's a whole chapter on the Meiklejohn College. I just discovered, by accident, when I was reading this chapter in an airplane, the name of my cousin's husband. And he was there. [chuckles] I was going to a Meiklejohn Conference, it turned out, so I opened the thing by saying, "Well, there's this capitalist side of the family, and this other side, and one of them was here." So, I talked about him.

Taylor: Which conference was that?

Smith: They used to have an annual Meiklejohn Conference at the University of Wisconsin, so I was at that.

Taylor: But you didn't know about Meiklejohn at all until after you came to Evergreen?

Smith: No. So, that was peculiar. Rediscovering your roots.

Taylor: Did you see, when you first arrived, tension in educational philosophy among the faculty? Was that obvious to you that people were at cross-purposes?

Smith: There were some differences about rigor. The scientists, obviously, had sequential curriculum, and they were committed to keeping it in place. They didn't think you could just do it for a year, and then go become something else. There was that difference. But I don't know if that's about difference in educational philosophy, as much as how much people were willing to commit to themselves to stay in one place. I sort of think that autonomy is actually the number one value here, not just the Five Foci.

But there were radical differences between Mary Hillaire, and Maxine Mimms and Bill Aldridge, and some of those people. That was almost about the debate in K—12, about Summerhill and some of those early experimentals. But most of those people got fired my first few years—Jim [Gulden] and some of those people who were—

Taylor: Yeah, but Richard Jones was fundamentally on that side.

Smith: Really? I never thought of him that way.

Taylor: Yeah, and Merv Cadwallader was fundamentally on a different side.

Smith: Yeah, I could see that.

Taylor: Fred Tabbutt was in a different place.

Smith: Yes. But Fred was a radical innovator. He just couldn't stop changing, but it was always in that domain.

Taylor: It was always in science.

Smith: But I don't think you have to wander outside of your field to have different approaches.

Taylor: No, no. This wasn't about what was right. It was just that there was this tension.

Smith: Yeah. That's what made it rich, though, for me, because it was like all new to me. So, there's this, and then there's this, and then there's this. Even though I didn't agree with it all.

Taylor: Yeah. But part of the problem was that the structure that was set up works for teaching some content, and not for teaching others. At the beginning, the structure and the content were together. Then people said, "We will accept the structure for everything—

Smith: Yeah, you can't over-generalize, though. But I think, because you have the arena of a whole year, there's a lot more latitude to try different things. And it might work, but it wouldn't in a four-credit class.

Taylor: Yeah. It works surprisingly well. But if you would talk to Fred Tabbutt about science, and Bob Sluss, or Larry Eickstaedt, you'd get a very different view.

Smith: Right. That's partly the difference between a chemist and a biologist, though. Field-based scientists are pretty different, I think, than taxonomic ones, and lab ones.

Taylor: And physics, I guess, because Byron Youtz and Rob Knapp were also in that.

Smith: Right. But I'm impatient with the purity approach, and I'm impatient with our unwillingness to give people support as they experiment. [chuckles]

Taylor: But one of the early, early problems that came right at the beginning was, "Could you do advanced work?"

Smith: Right.

Taylor: How do you design a curriculum that does that? And different disciplines require different preparation.

Smith: Right. And does it matter, in some disciplines, at all?

Taylor: So, how did you solve that?

Smith: I don't think it matters in my field, frankly

Taylor: But it certainly matters in chemistry.

Smith: Absolutely.

Taylor: And it matters in French.

Smith: I think that's part of the answer is finding out where it works.

Taylor: How did you deal with that with the curriculum?

Smith: Well, I think I didn't deal with it. But we tried to press people to think about it. But they wouldn't stay in one place long enough, usually, to do it, except in the areas, I think, that needed it most. It interacted with the real problem that the students were all over the place, because it was open admission, really.

Taylor: Yeah. So, you say the fundamental value of the college is autonomy, say a bit more; the pluses and minuses of that, and how it plays out.

Smith: I just saw, in a lot of different domains, about rules that weren't rules, whether it was having students do self-evaluations or not. There was just a lot of things that we said we really valued that, in fact, when you actually looked at the data, they weren't universally supported or practiced. And there was no consequence; there wasn't even really any talk about it hardly. I think that covers quite a different whole array of subjects, not just students' self-evaluation.

Taylor: Can the college survive with that kind of climate?

Smith: Freedom? It yields a mixed reputation is what it leads to.

Taylor: As the Curriculum Dean, or as the Provost, did you have any leverage?

Smith: I thought the leverage came from having structures, like planning units, and having conveners that actually worked together with the Curriculum Dean, and, I think, I generally tried to do that. There's just a lot of assumptions made that just aren't discussed, because there's never time and space made for having those discussions to get on the same page. And I'm not arguing for uniformity, but I think there are some fundamental things that people want to know [laughing] and should agree on. And then, there's a lot that can be shared, even if it's not copied.

Look at the program history. That just completely fell in disuse, because no one wanted to repeat anything else. So, the level of curiosity about each other, it seemed low from my point of view, as a dean who saw it all. I would get so excited about what people told me that I would think, they should all know this. We need to figure out a way for them to learn from each other more.

Taylor: That's what I always felt was the biggest advantage of Evergreen . . .

When people say "faculty development," well, to me, it was being on a different team every year.

Smith: I agree. I still remember LLyn De Danaan saying to me at one point that "You've got to keep your structures alive, too, because otherwise, they can just walk through the distinctive features of the school, and it's like dead." And I think that can happen—and it has happened, in some cases—to team teaching, to evaluating, to doing narrative evaluations, to doing conferences; a meaningless ritual if you don't really believe in the roots, and understand them. Talking is part of it. Togetherness.

Taylor: When you think back on your time as Curriculum Dean particularly, what are you proudest of? What do you think you accomplished?

Smith: I think my biggest accomplishment was probably Learning Communities as a national movement, because there's a thousand schools doing this now.

Taylor: Yeah. You started that not as Provost?

Smith: Right, as dean.

Taylor: Was that just your idea?

Smith: It came out of studying the literature about the importance of structure. And then, it just came almost surreptitiously, because I went to do a conference on general education at Central, and I did a panel on how our core curriculum was organized. The next day, this dean called me from Seattle Central and he said, "That's really interesting, what you said about coordinated studies. Can we come and visit you?"

So, he brought a van of 15 people down, and they visited all different programs. At the end of the day, they said, "We want to send you two faculty to teach full-time." And they taught with Thad Curtz. And that's where it started. Then, I saw, wow, is this a powerful transferrable idea.

Taylor: That's what sometimes gets lost, that these teams were functioning, and somebody from the outside came and said, "Whoa."

Smith: Yeah, it's very obvious, actually. When it works, it's contagious almost. And I think that people get bored easily, too, maybe more so here because it attracts a more risky, creative kind of person. I think they need feedback, and new ideas, and new ways to feel validated.

Taylor: Continue the story about when this group from Seattle Central come. Then what happens?

Smith: They came, and we decided it was so effective—first of all, they sent the cream of the crop down here. Valerie Bystrom. Then some of our cream of the crop, like Marilyn Frasca, heard about it, and they wanted in, so they went back there. It spread kind of like a positive virus, and then we decided we could get funding for this. The Washington Center could be set up to be an import-export thing. We could do faculty development for Evergreen, and it could do statewide development. We got money, and Patrick was here, so he was all for it.

Taylor: So, you got support from Patrick?

Smith: Oh, yes.

Taylor: Where did the grant come from?

Smith: The first grants that started it were from Exxon and the Ford Foundation. Two years later, the Legislature funded it. Two years after that, they funded four other public service centers. But that was a rich period. We were lucky. There was money.

Taylor: There was money, and you had the ideas.

Smith: Yeah, it was sexy. It was really easy to show why this should be funded.

Taylor: What were these service centers? There was the Washington Center. That was the first one.

Smith: Yeah, and then there was the Labor Center, and then there was a K—12 Center that Magda Costantino started. The first one, I think, was the Washington Public Policy Institute for the Legislature. We're still the house for it, but we never had anything to do with it, really. It's an arm of the Legislature. And then the Longhouse, and the Northwest Indian Applied Research Institute. Then a bunch of those dissolved or went to another college.

Taylor: But the Washington Center, you and Jean ran it.

Smith: Yeah, it was a quarter of my time. They wrote me a contract that I'd do that a quarter time and be a three-fourths time dean. I did them both, and that's what kept me alive intellectually. But we were really purposeful about bringing it back to Evergreen. We'd go through the list of faculty and make sure everybody was involved, and take them to events.

Taylor: And you went to all the community colleges.

Smith: Mm-hm.

Taylor: I think most all the community colleges now have a coordinated studies program, a Learning [Community].

Smith: Yeah, but not like they did 10 years ago. Most innovations go through a period of all the risky faculty---the choir--- signing up first. And then, if they're not replaced, you can't kind go deeper.

Taylor: Then it becomes sort of watered down, and not very exciting, and then it dies because it's not very exciting.

Smith: Yeah, cycles.

Taylor: Maybe that's the fundamental problem. You can't expect the same kind of adrenaline to run about a new idea when it's not new anymore.

Smith: Pioneers have a special energy, I think. And it's partly because you're comparing, I think. There's no comparison in that first adrenaline. It did feel, when I came in '78—it was just a subtext, but it felt like people were saying, "Well, you missed the really hot years."

End Part 1 of 2 of Barbara Leigh Smith on 10-12-17