

Maxine Mimms
Interviewed by Zhang Er [Mingxia Li] with Gilda Sheppard
The Evergreen State College oral history project
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FINAL

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Mimms: This is a conversation.

Sheppard: Right. But here we are, sitting on this kind of cloudy day at Dr. Mimms's house, and eating Ethiopian lentil soup with [Shang Er] Mingxia Li, and we're here getting ready to do our thing.

Er: And Dr. Gilda Sheppard and [Shang Er] Mingxia Li are here with Dr. Maxine Mimms for the Evergreen oral history project at her beautiful home at Oyster Bay with a beach.

Dr. Mimms, would you tell us something about yourself before you came to Evergreen, and some about your childhood, your upbringing, and then, what led you to Evergreen?

Mimms: I was born in Newport News, Virginia, March 4, 1928. In fact, yesterday, I was 89 years old. That's not bad, is it?

Sheppard: That's wonderful.

Mimms: I'm having a bittersweet weekend because, as I age, I'm beginning to have those huge losses of close, close, close friends. On February 11, I funeralized one of my dear, dear friends. Went to North Carolina to honor a dear friend, Dr. Angelou, because they built a residence hall with her name. The joy of that experience, the sadness of my friend, Ruth McIntyre.

Then I get to the thing to pick up my luggage and I get a call that my dear friend, Vickie [Williams], at L.E.M.S Bookstore that I've been going to with conversation for the last eight years, because I needed that. I had transferred that Evergreen model to an urban area in Seattle and the third Friday of every month for the last eight years, I have been conducting a seminar with people in Seattle. It is just a tremendous loss to me. My heart is heavy.

So, for me to do this interview with the two of you, is very rewarding for me because it keeps me thinking, busy, and moving forward. Know how grateful and blessed I am. There's a loss and there's a gain. As long as that balance continues to happen in my life, I'm feeling fine.

But I was born in Newport News, Virginia, and went to segregated schools—Booker T. Washington and Huntington High School. Then I went to a private Baptist school, Virginia Union, in Richmond, Virginia. So, all of my early education was in the South—Richmond, Virginia and Newport

News, Virginia. I was not very far from Hampton University, which meant that I heard a number of lectures.

My father in particular was a Garveyite and believed in the improvement of the Negro, so I've always been in that vocabulary; that the Negro succeeds because, or, the Negro has confidence because. I was always encouraged and rewarded and knew that I had an obligation to make a contribution for social justice in this society.

I don't know what else you want to know. But what I would like to do with this interview, because it is an interview, is have more of a conversation. We never were forced a series of structured questions, and I understand this is going to the Archives, and I was trying to think of the portfolios I believe that are in the Archives at Evergreen. I came to Evergreen in 1972.

Er: How did you hear about Evergreen?

Mimms: I have been in education since 1950. I was a teacher, a summer school principal, a consultant, an administrator with the Seattle Public Schools—I left in 1969—but they were always talking in the State of Washington. I was always on committees talking about building a new college.

But this place, The Evergreen State College, was considered in early dialog to be the south campus of the University of Washington. I was on committees and this kind of thing. I left in '69 to go back to work in the Nixon Administration to be the Assistant Director, with Libby Koontz, in the Women's Bureau there in '69.

I'd heard from LLyn Patterson that I knew in Seattle about this new school that was being built for higher education. Well, nobody thinks about that. I was having a good time in D.C. LLyn wanted me to be interviewed, so she asked Merv Cadwallader, who was a Dean, and Charlie Teske, to interview me when they came back to D.C. to recruit the first faculty of 1972.

Some had already been here. The planners came in '67 and we opened in '71, so that was the first faculty. I came with the second thing. I think there must have been about 40 of us at that time that came in '72. But I was interviewed in D.C. in a hotel room by Merv Cadwallader. We had the best time. I heard the other day that he's still alive.

When I came in '72, it was so unusually different. I'm leaving D.C.—Black, Black—and I come to Evergreen—white, white. It was just shocking. I couldn't put it together, but it was a really exciting time. New thoughts.

Er: What happened in that interview that made you want to come to this white, white place?

Mimms: I didn't know I was coming to a white, white place. [laughing] I wanted to come back to the State of Washington. I'd had a wonderful time in D.C., and I wanted to come back. I had friends here.

Then I came and I heard more—from Merv than from Charlie—about the excitement of being very creative in something in higher ed, and I loved being creative in education, language like “coordinated studies” and “interdisciplinary” stuff and “independent contracts.”

But I thought, because we were close to Olympia, I would see and experience more students of color coming out of the military and coming out of the Tacoma area. This was a new State college, so I thought I would see a larger percentage of people of color. But I didn’t, and it was all right for a little while. [laughing]

Er: Were you living in Olympia at that time, or were you in Tacoma?

Mimms: I lived in Tacoma the entire time.

Er: What was the school like at the beginning?

Mimms: Oh, my gosh.

Er: Were you team teaching already?

Mimms: My first coordinated studies was with Carolyn Dobbs. Learning About Learning was the name of the program. Carolyn, Charlie Lyons, Earle McNeil, and Mark Papworth—we were all together in that. I don’t know what that meant, but I just know that they were just . . . I could be who I am. I could be elegant. Exotic. We just lied, and told things to each other and made up stories. We went as extreme as we could.

In that first faculty that I worked with, Charlie was a dreamer. I think Charlie’s discipline was political science. Mark’s was anthropology. The excitement of intellectually constantly trying to find ways to deliver language to young people was very exciting for me.

We had an opportunity every Wednesday to go to a faculty meeting and we found out about our personalities. I was thinking often we hear about all of the structure of starting Evergreen. Most of Evergreen was started because most of those 17 men were just selfish and personable and wanted to do things to be free themselves.

Wednesday wasn’t just some day that we structured because it was intellectual. It was so that Merv could go skiing. A lot of this stuff was based around conveniences. And a lot of the modeling was based around personal—That’s my phone.

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Mimms: Do you want me to continue to talk?

Er: Yes.

Mimms: We disagreed, and we agreed, and we had programs to break up because the personalities were just too strong. Just working that through.

One of the things I thought the model was extraordinary because you were forced all the time to be considerate, even though you disagreed, because you never knew whether that was going to be the person you were going to be working with the following year.

At that time, we moved offices. We weren't allowed to stay in our offices any longer than a year, which meant that you could not form bonds in such a way that you would have to exclude, just in case you sought an inclusion.

That's why this whole dean stuff is interesting. Deans went in as faculty, and they had to figure out a way to work with you, even though they were going to be your evaluators. They could not be oppressive because they didn't know who they were going to work with when they came out of the dean's chair.

What I learned was the importance of inclusivity in a situation that was very difficult for me as a Black woman totally, completely powerful in the contributions to the Black community from childhood—Garvey and on and on—I think forced me to be patient enough to listen to differences that I had not been exposed to.

In doing that, it helped me to develop a lot. I became a coordinator of my own coordinated studies. I had to become my own noun. I had to become “the” coordinated studies—Maxine—and look at myself from multiple perspectives so that I could hear at a different level, so that I could see at a different level, and allow my sense to operate. It was very challenging for me my first year.

Er: Do you happen to remember the program's title? How about the students?

Mimms: Learning about learning. Knowing about knowing. That's what I remember for myself, and that was a program that—learning about learning has always stuck with me, because that's exactly what life is all about. You cannot do anything unless you have the courage to learn about your learning and be risky enough to do something with it and about it.

Sheppard: In those early days, Dr. Mimms, when you still were friends with our sister friends, were you friends with my auntie over there?

Mimms: Yes.

Sheppard: When you and she had conversations about The Evergreen State College, do you remember any of those conversations?

Mimms: Yes, I do. I told her I thought it was the craziest place I'd ever seen in my life. I said this to all my friends, and they prayed for me because it was just a crazy place. I mean, you had people with blue hair. Red hair. People with dogs. Coming to class with dogs. I don't know anything about that. I'm from a culture that is elegant and very well-dressed, highly respected. Calling people with PhDs by their

first names. “Sid.” “Rudy.” “Willi.” Dogs coming into your classroom, and white, funny-looking people. I mean funny-looking at that time, to me. They would come in with robes on. Just shorts on and robes.

The faculty was so interesting. You’d walk across campus, and you’d walk across Red Square, and nobody thought anybody looked queer—I did—looked queer and weird. It was the weirdness that was forcing you to reduce your judgment of differences.

I had no idea that a blue-haired, white boy who looked like he’d been malnourished would be able to have a conversation with me about Marcus Garvey, because he’d read a lot about Marcus Garvey. Just looking at him made me nervous.

I am a Black person that in a white neighborhood like that, you hold your purse because you don’t know what kind of neighborhood you’re in. Evergreen was a different kind of neighborhood for me, but I was able, with courage, to manipulate for myself and have the courage enough to keep forcing myself to be included.

That’s the key. Force yourself to be included. Even though you know that maybe the shallowness of rejection is there, just keep on moving through. The next thing you know, you’re free of the judgments, and it allows you to live longer. It gets you balanced. I feel very healthy because Evergreen helped me to reduce my cynicism about life and reduce my vulgarity of excluding, which meant that I had no idea I was going to be faced later on in life with gender identity, all of that.

But, because of Evergreen helping me understand, aha! That’s a person. Because of Evergreen, I’ve been able to be happier in my life. Cynicism, judgment and exclusion is a disease and it’s dangerous. It’s an epidemic that will kill you. It brings about all kinds of illnesses in our society, and we don’t want to talk about judging for the purpose of exclusion. I’ve learned that, and I know that’s the only reason I’m able to say I’m 89 years old. I know it’s because Evergreen allowed me to have that space, to be in that space, and have that time to reduce my capital C Cynicism and my capital J Judgment and get it smaller and smaller. The longer I live, the smaller it has become, and a lot of it is gone. It’s a joy.

Er: Are you particularly referring as an African American woman the race?

Mimms: Right. C’mon. What can a white person, in my upbringing, do for me? I’m from the segregated South. I don’t even want to be bothered with white people, except for when I’m in a working situation or a housing situation.

But Evergreen said, “Do you have something in your life that can be available, and can you learn something from a blue-haired, malnourished, white kid from Minnesota?” C’mon. I didn’t run into these kinds of people in life. And to have a conversation over coffee? Eat potato chips in a room?

Something called “potluck.” I’d never heard of potluck. The luck of the pot? That’s the most vulgar sound a Black woman like me can stand. The luck of a pot? I’m not from that kind of generation and I’m not from that kind of culture. Most of the stuff they made, you had these potlucks, and you had these retreat things, and it was just something.

And Birkenstock shoes. I’m from a generation with heels and stockings, and the seam in the stocking has to be straight. You had women, colleagues, with funny-looking shoes that looked like boats on. They would say, “Good morning.” I couldn’t say “Good morning” back. I would, but I’d spend a lot of time looking at the shoes they had on

And the kindness, the consideration, the desire to collaborate. This is what’s missing in our educational model now. Because we are trained to have departments and compartments. Evergreen let me put all of that together and let me make an integrated dialog—it can be called whatever it wants to be called, but an integrated dialog—and free you up from that. It helped me.

Er: Were you able to make friends among Evergreen faculty?

Mimms: Lasting, lasting friends. Yes.

Er: Who are your friends from the early days?

Mimms: Llyn, my next-door neighbor. Llyn De Danaan now. She was Llyn Patterson. Marilyn Frasca was in the Art Department. Merv Cadwallader. I love him because he allowed me to be an exotic, elegant Black woman. That was freeing. Mary Hillaire, who’s gone now. Dave Whitener. Early days, Joye Hardiman came in ’75. Just a lot. I would consider most of them acquaintances with a high degree of tolerance, and then some more intimate. Betsy Diffendal. Yeah.

Sheppard: So, you were the first Black faculty?

Mimms: Female.

Sheppard: Who was there before?

Mimms: Rudy Martin and Willie Parson and LeRoi Smith. They were there when I got there. Willie was a microbiologist; Rudy, literature; LeRoi was psychology.

Sheppard: And then Joye was the second?

Mimms: Joye came in ’75. Angela Gilliam, I can’t remember the year she came, but she came later. Winnie Ingram, I believe she came in ’73 or ’74. She was in psychology.

Sheppard: At any time, did the Black faculty get together and say, “We’ve got to get some Black students here”?

Mimms: Oh, gawd. Rudy and Willie became deans, and they also were from WSU. Oh, my gawd. Rudy started there, I can’t think of the name of the program, but it was something like African American

Association or something, and those students all went to Rudy. Rudy did a lot of recruiting out of Tacoma.

But enough was enough for me. After a while, you just said, well, with all of this elegance coming from the State—tax dollars—where are the Black students? This shows how silly you can be. I'm driving from Tacoma, passing all these Black people, who were staying in TCC and Pierce College, and driving down here to deal with blue-haired, malnourished white students. You can't get any crazier than that.

[Telephone rings and Dr. Mimms answers it at 00:13:52 and speaks till end of recording 00:14:34]

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Mimms: Bless his heart.

Sheppard: I loved it when you said "potluck," because when I came here, I didn't know what potluck was.

Mimms: I didn't know what it was. Luck of a pot.

Sheppard: It used to be in the Black community, if you brought some food over, it was an insult. You cooked the food. It's so funny. It's just different.

Er: Turns out, I did some research. It's from Native American "potlatch."

Mimms: Potlatch?

Er: It was a little bit about a gathering. They have a lot of religious, social, tribal activities. Eating is a minor part. But then the whites appropriated the dinner thing.

Sheppard: Right! Right! The part about everybody's got to work. That's so funny. So, Dr. Mimms, you were saying . . .

Er: . . . when the first Black students came.

Mimms: Rudy had recruited some. I don't know what year. There were a few there on the Olympia Campus. I was driving from Tacoma, as I said, to come to Olympia. That shows some real mental health issues, because a Black woman leaving her community to come down to deal with another community, and it just bothered me.

I went into the Brown Star Grill, which was on K Street at that time. It was called K Street. There was a woman named Pat [Banes? 00:01:39] and Mary Harper, and Mary Harper was saying that she had sickle cell, and Mary was saying, "I don't know how I'm going to get out of this."

Pat said to Mary, "I heard that there's a new faculty that lives here, a Black woman." And they talked about me. I was over in the next booth. They talked about me in not a very kind way. And they

laughed at me. I raised up and I said, “My name is Maxine Mimms,” and they were just shocked. They were just shocked.

I listened to the difficulty. What had been going on at Pierce College and TCC. You get in the ‘90s English and math, and you just stay there for years and years and years. Eventually, you get an AA. Then you get another AA. Then you get another AA.

Because they had two private schools, UPS and PLU. That was heavy, heavy tuition, so the way you made progress, at the time, it was heavy metropolitan development council. These were all non-profit agencies. We were just coming out. This was ‘72, so we were just coming out all of that stuff with Johnson, which was the poverty program. We were at the tail end of that, so there was still a lot of non-profits left; a lot of Black people working in non-profits, and they got ahead by the certificates coming out of Pierce and TCC.

At that time, the independent contract was one of our popular models in Tacoma. I lived at 1005 North Prospect; Betsy Diffendal lived at 1007. I thought, if I could have these two women come to my house in the morning, then I could get down here to learn about learning with Carol and all of them at 10:00 am. That’s what I would do. So, I designed myself to get in here late, and I started at 5:00 in the morning up in Tacoma in my kitchen.

Most of my students were coming from the Tacoma Narcotics Center. They would pass the word. It got too big for my kitchen. Then I went to the Tacoma Community House, which was heavy, heavy Asian. Oh, after that, I went to the Colored Women’s Club, and from the Colored Women’s Club, I went to the Puyallup Tribe, their place. I just moved.

Lo and behold, after two years, I must have had 35 students, and all 35 of those students marched across that stage together. I had kept them under what I thought was a group contract. I don’t know what it was, but we were together, reading and thinking together. And that’s the history.

Er: Do you remember some of the books the students read?

Mimms: Themselves?

Er: Yes.

Mimms: The thing that you have to understand about the Tacoma Campus, and higher education in particular—I just left Wake Forest and they’re doing the same thing—people of color have got to understand it’s more than one story. When you’re of color in America, you are a multiple story. You are multiple books.

So, you’ve got to find that part of your life and go to that textbook, if you will. Textbooks cause us to replace our own value. You will believe that Ericson, a fraud, is more important than Uncle Willie.

Uncle Willie may have done evidence-based work by just modeling and having the courage to continue to live in this society and be successful in the movement.

You have to be very careful replacing your stories with other stories. We've got to let these stories—books and the literature—supplement our stories. That's how I started the autobiographical stuff, which you all are doing now in terms of memoirs. I didn't want memoirs because I didn't know how to get it into that piece and that design, so I wanted the stories.

What you had was Black people, for the first time, really believing that they left the Mississippi cottonfield. They didn't go into the military because they were patriotic. They went into the military to get out of the cottonfield. Incidentally and secondarily, they may have learned something about patriotism.

Once you learn why you went in there, then your business of hatred for the enemy [chuckles] is reduced. You won't find yourself, as a Black person, supporting Japanese concentration camps. You will understand that you were in a concentration camp in the cottonfield, and you will understand this is your brother and your sister, and that level of hatred has to be diminished.

That's what we did. We had some literature. I did a lot of reading. A lot of James Baldwin stuff. I used a lot of the jazz musicians' work. I did a lot with that kind of literature because I believe that jazz, which has all kinds of rhythms in it, tells a story that leads to the lyrics that we now have in rapping. And I believe that jazz was always the poetry of a community.

The joy of doing that, I could see what was happening to students, Black women and Black men who were singing in the Gospel choir when they knew they were a Greek chorus; when they found that they could read the Greek literature, if you will, because they were the Greek chorus, and so on and so on, back to the Baptist church, the Pentecostal church.

It was exciting to experience the evolution of Black consciousness in adults. I had the pleasure of seeing that. It's one of the most rewarding experiences. When the structure of a Black person begins to open up and expand, and that person is able to then [deep intake of breath] have an aha moment and say, "Oh, I do have some brilliance in my family. I have seen some geniuses in my neighborhood." I saw Uncle Willie is someone that's not a throwaway. And I've experienced that, and it's just been life-enriching for me.

Sheppard: We still hear that from students today, how having the autobiography—now we call it memoir—that you started as something that helps them to see that they are smart. I remember once you told me when you recruited me, you said, "Gilda, whatever you do as a teacher, you have to make sure that the student sees themselves in everything."

Mimms: You have to see yourself. The thing that I've been blessed with is when I go back to Evergreen once a quarter, and something stands up—55, 50—with laughter—I said, "This is my first time speaking or my second time speaking. I want to thank you." And then rattles on this information about how they're feeling to have lived to actually see that autobiographical—which I believe in—biographical, is the only way to deliver information, if you will, and exchange information to students of color. It's the poet. It's the musician. It's the filmmaker. It's all of that. And what causes the Tacoma Campus to still be there is that the stories are now cemented in the concrete. You can't do nothing with it. We've got to get more students, but that's not the issue. The issue is making sure those stories are constantly there.

Sheppard: Dr. Mimms, you have a lot of rituals that are embedded into the Tacoma program—like you said, the memoir. Then you also have "giveback." You also have the values. Could you talk to us about why you did that, the giveback and the values as part of education, part of Tacoma Evergreen?

Mimms: You're valuable. When you're born, and you hit that first grade, you hit that preschool, and that teacher says, "Boys and girls, line up," you're then stripped of your identity. For the next 12 years, you simply are "boys and girls, line up." You're the freshman class, you're the sophomore class, the junior class. You're the football person. You're constantly shifting around, and what education does is show you how to devalue yourself and those around you.

When you fall into that, it takes a long time to get you to see how brilliant you are; that your indigenous nature makes you be the genius that you are.

If I had my way, when a baby is born, I would grant a college degree along with the birth certificate, so learning could really take place in our society. Competing and working for the freshman year, the sophomore year—"I've got to make it to the next year"—makes a level of aggression in our learning process, our development, which forces us to compete for too long in our lives.

Particularly now that we've got so much technology, we've got to find a way to grant the degree so learning and collaboration can take place in a joyful way. You can reduce that level of competition, which will reduce the level of greed that we're having in society. I think that we have to do it.

The autobiography, the multiple stories, the autobiography and the memoirs will rise. When you look around, lo and behold, the discovery is huge. We'll discover that we've been thinking about you as a sociologist for all of these years, and I'll be darned, when the autobiography is written, there is Dr. Gilda Sheppard, a true scientist. There is Dr. Ming, a true sociologist.

You're just shocked with the discovery. We've got to have those discoveries of ourselves. "Really?" "Really?" "Unbelievable."

And the next thing you know, we're sharing in a world that is so culturally sophisticated. Right now, it is stupid in America to be talking about bathrooms and pronouns and nouns and gender identity when we've had so much experience with rights for women, rights for race. We have a lot of experiences in how to include differences. It's so sad to see every time a difference, a discovery of something different occurs, we've got to go through all kinds of mess to be retrained.

I have never gone to a white person—never—and asked them for a bibliography to teach white students. White people do that all the time. They do.

They ask you, "Do you have some books that . . .?" I have never asked a white teacher to give me a list of books to teach white people, because I've assumed that the books that I use will teach them.

But because we don't have an opportunity to discover ourselves, and then put that discovery on display, we're constantly asking, we're constantly shocked when something different occurs. It's horrible.

Er: In the early days, when you'd do the individual learning with the students, any issues, any particular student's learning that exemplify the pedagogy concerns you just mentioned?

Mimms: I had a lot of military people that had gotten out of the military and they'd gone to TCC and Pierce. It was very exciting to see that the model of the curriculum design that Evergreen was known for, how it freed them. These are grown men who'd been sergeants and lieutenants and all those ranks, and sergeant majors who began to understand that they weren't sergeant majors just because of the military. They were sergeant majors at birth. It was an uncle or a mother or a neighbor that saw something in his or her leadership ability that allowed this structure to reward them.

To see grown men and grown women be competitive over a little piece of cloth stripe, they loved those stripes. I thought, oh, what can I do about these stripes? They loved them. You've got two E-8s and E-7s, and when they first came, they would sit E-7s and E-6s and sit near E-8s or whatever, and the sergeant major. I said, "It's just a piece of cloth."

Then I began to reward them every week. I honored them with a party. We had a party every Thursday night.

[Telephone rings and Dr. Mimms answers it at 00:18:20 and speaks till end of recording 00:18:27]

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Mimms: The excitement, as I said, of recognizing. Evergreen, in those early days, introduced me, again, to another stage of my humanity. That's why I appreciate Evergreen so much, for the early days. It wasn't easy. It helped me a lot.

Er: And you were talking about the sergeant majors when they appreciated a little piece of cloth.

Mimms: The stripe. What I had to do, I had to figure out, what gives them a chance to display their greatness? I figured I couldn't do any more. I figured, their favorite meals, bring it on Thursday. We had a big party every Thursday night, and they invited community people. Most of my students did all the recruiting. I brought in speakers from all over the country and we just partied every Thursday night after class, sometimes till 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. You found small clusters of people talking and complimenting each other, and they gave each other the stripes. "Man, I sure did like"—"I heard you the other day say that when you were in Germany, you collected so and so. I never thought of that level of collection. I like what you said."

Rather than competing with each other, they had the ceremony rewarding each other with a stripe. So, in front of themselves, Sergeant Major So-and-So really became Sergeant Major Civilian.

I said to all of them at the end, "It isn't a matter of graduation. It isn't about a degree, but in front of your peers, when you can stand and share your experiences." So, I always had the faculty at the very end to sit in a circle. The student came and, in front of us, he or she presented to the faculty "my learnings." Most of them would cry because they'd never been asked to receive their reward, their stripe, that way in front of peers and colleagues. We bonded. We became community through that school.

But I also used a lot of money to bring in Maya, Odetta, John Henrik Clarke. I brought them in. We had a party on Thursday. Got the building ready for guests on Friday, so Friday, we started about 5:00. I brought in speakers from all over the country. Stone Thomas used a lot of the money from that department to help me add some money to bring them in.

Sheppard: You brought in Shirley Chisholm.

Mimms: Everybody.

Sheppard: Maya Angelou.

Mimms: John Henrik Clarke. Wade Nobles. Everybody. Everybody that I knew that I had experienced that would help me grow individually. So, the Blackness or whatever, you didn't have to worry about being Black. You didn't have to worry about Black Power.

As I say to the young people now, "You don't have to say, 'Black Lives Matter.' What you have to say in your spirit is 'Black Matter Lives.' And once you understand that it's living, then it can be out there, anywhere at any time and all the time." It really is wonderful. That's what would begin to happen at the campus.

Sheppard: We call those senior [sentences? 00:04:08] now, when a senior goes away and feels as though one other ritual—

Mimms: The giveback was because when a guest comes, you always make that guest feel welcome. You start that with the birthday party. When you have little birthday parties, you're trained at home to say to your little friend, "Thank you for coming. Thank you for the gift." You're trained to say that.

That's the giveback. You came to make me feel important, and because you came, you are important. That's all the giveback is. The person is prepared. The person is sitting in the seat prepared. Because we recognize me as great. You recognize me. And you just sit there. It's very hard to get that giveback to those that are used to responding to a Q&A.

In the community of color, Q&A means I have to stand up and ask a question and get an answer. Giveback is just that I've learned to share your contribution and feed it back to you. Thank you. That's all that is, rather than feedback. I ain't feeding nothing. I'll just give it back. I don't want to feed nobody nothing. I don't want them to mistake feedback with potluck. [laughter]

Er: When I first came to Tacoma, very late in the game, I felt the whole campus had a culture that was so unique because, for me, it was naivete. I thought, oh, this must be the Black culture I'm exposed to. How much is the Black culture, and how much is the Maxine culture? Can you say the link?

Mimms: Let me tell you. Years ago, meme, language—we could not have heard that because our listening skills weren't that sharp. We would have gone with the literature of the dialog, and the literature of the dialog says if you don't understand a faculty, [unintelligible 00:06:23]. But now, we know you're there for errors, so we come with the anticipation of listening at a level.

The culture, because you're there, the ability to listen now is spread all over Tacoma, because the word is in the church. "Girl, did you have her on Tuesday? Lord, did you hear her?" It's the gossip about you that permeates a community. You see what I'm saying? Once that begins to occur, then the stories are expanded.

That's the beauty of Evergreen. The more diversity that you have, the more expansive the stories. The more differences that you try to bring into the model, the broader the stories.

Sheppard: So, this is Black culture, Maxine?

Mimms: I don't know how to separate it yet. I might be able someday. I might be able to separate it after I die, but I don't know how to separate it right now.

There was a time I might have been able to do it, but I've been so busy making sure that the cynicism and the judgment is reduced, and that my life gets exposed to as much as I possibly can, because there's such a joy in exposure. It may be Maxine, and it may be the Black culture, I don't know.

Er: Teaching in Tacoma, we have students come in with this very fixed, regional identity.

Mimms: Right.

Er: I don't know how to help them to see that if you reduce cynicism and judgment based on your individual, personal—I'm sure it's all magnified. I'm sure there is a reason for them to believe that. Like what you were saying, if you reduce that, expose yourself, it's a growing growth rather than a threat.

Mimms: We're going to have to come to grips in America that health, death, health reform, all of this, is totally related to differences. If we don't—in this country that claims it wants to have a system of heterogeneous living—begin to try to find a way to include, then our diseases are going to increase.

You sit in your house and turn on your television, the pharmaceutical companies are saying every day, "If you put this pill in your mouth, the risk factors are thus. You will die." Everything tells you you will die if you drop this pill. If you listen to what happens, it's high blood pressure, da da da da, and it's just the subtle thing saying, "I want you to hate yourself. I want you to hate everybody on your block. I want you to hate everything that's different. I want you to have that, and then I want you to allow me to practice and give you a pill and see how quickly you will die."

You cannot have fast food with as much salt as we have and expect to live. In the Black community, you have the fast foods and the fried foods in a lot of Black churches. The person whose funeral you just attended died from high blood pressure or a heart attack or diabetes. I go to the graveyard, and I watch the casket go down in the ground, get back in the limousine and go to the repast. And the same food that killed that person is what's being served there.

This is no accident. Higher education—educators—we've got to look at stuff that will encourage people to live. With the curriculum, let's say, on the Tacoma Campus, the next person that should be hired there should be a person who's a movement specialist. Someone to help those people after they've gone through what they think is the stress of writing or the stress of whatever it is, and they eat a little bit of the fast food. Some movement person there, five minutes, 10 minutes a day, to help them live. The next level of education is going to have to be movement.

Er: Rather than criticizing what's wrong, tell us how to live better.

Mimms: That's exactly right.

Er: Rather than how to blame other people who did wrong to us.

Mimms: That's exactly right. That's what I'm saying the earliest stages of Evergreen did. I don't know what Evergreen is doing now, but I hear some challenging things. But the Tacoma Campus still feels like it's hospitable to me. It really does. When you walk in that door, there is a hello. There really is.

Sheppard: Dr. Mimms, you said that the Evergreen model, particularly when you think about Evergreen Tacoma, is like the one-room schoolhouse that a lot of Black communities grew up with that really springs from Black culture. Could you tell us about that?

Mimms: That's exactly right. And in the neighborhood, when you die or when a baby's born, the first text messaging was the clothesline. That's how we texted. If a baby is born, baby clothes were hung up on the line. That let the neighborhood know the baby came. If someone died—a man died—shirts, pants, were no longer on that clothesline. Someone died.

So, your text messaging was graphic. The images, that's how you did it. Talk about characters. We did much better than this new text messaging. If you've got 140 characters in this, we did it with 10. Baby born. Somebody died.

You constantly allowed the communication to be graphic, like design. The model of seminar is totally a Black construct. We had the family. We did not wait until Thanksgiving to have the Sunday dinner. You always went by Sister So-and-So's house. That's how you didn't know all parts of the chicken because the men got the best parts of the chicken. The children got the feet. I never even knew chickens had any parts to them other than the feet and wings. I thought all chickens had was wings. That's all I got, because the adults got the best part, the breast and thigh and the legs. It happened every Sunday. You could drive by anybody's house and the pot was always on the stove, the pot of soup.

So, the seminar, the discussions, the reading of the newspaper—right up to this day, I have to read two or three newspapers—discussing Howard Thurman. If you go down to Hampton University and you hear Howard Thurman speak, my family was obligated to come back, and on a Sunday or a Thursday night or a Friday night, we would have a discussion on what Howard Thurman spoke about. Gardner Taylor, all of the great thinkers. Benjamin Mayes. All these great thinkers were discussed in these homes on a regular basis.

Seminar was hell. Coordinated studies, you had, and individual contracts. In your dining room, these dining room tables, we were accustomed to big, old oak tables where you sat around and discussed important things. And you heard the man or the woman say, "I'm saddened by that." Or "I'm elated." Or "I'm happy about that."

I remember when Joe Louis was fighting, and he was the person that gave us our freedom through using his fists and knocking somebody out. Those discussions were deep, and they were always mixed with what Howard Thurman would say intellectually about the spirit, not using Joe Louis's name.

I remember seminars that I had long before Evergreen. We didn't call them that. We just said the families gathered and we were there. Your cousins. My cousins were my brothers and sisters. First cousins, aunts and uncles, lived at your house. You put pallets on the floor. If the snow came, you never thought about going home. You just laid down on the floor on blankets. There was always soup to

share. There was always coffee. There was always sharing. I miss that. I try to keep up a lot of that image in my life.

Er: Can you say something about the Tacoma Campus, particularly in relationship to the Olympia Campus in terms of organization, in terms of finance, in terms of pedagogy? Any difference?

Mimms: I think so. All I wanted for Tacoma, I was not concerned about a building. I wanted education in the hearts of Black people. I don't care—and I'll say it—it wasn't about a building for me. It was about, I knew that some of you would come along later on in life and deal with scholarship.

I didn't care whether the people could read or write. What I wanted them to do was to become human with themselves. I wanted them to feel their humanity. Because I knew eventually there would be some of you that would come with the scholarship that was necessary, or the model for reading and writing. All I wanted was for them to come—and I'm calling that access—and stay—I'm calling that retention. Come and be with each other and be with yourself.

Once I saw that that was important, that was the pedagogy. I kept the umbrella of coordinated studies and group contracts and individual contracts over the people. I kept introducing the vocabulary that the Olympia literature used, so that the people in the urban areas knew that they were part of a system.

That's why I never called it a program, I always called it a campus, because I did not want Black people to feel they were less than. You must remember about language. When anything happens, you have to be very careful about what happens with it.

When you twist the program, it doesn't matter that it doesn't have a library. It doesn't matter to me that it doesn't have anything. I don't care if it was a strip with one roll of toilet paper. For me, it was a campus. Because my people had to understand that the Historical Black Colleges that they had to run away from in the South—that the military took them to, to run away from the cottonfield to that—that they were capable of being participants in a historical Black experience on a campus that gave them the courage and security to say, "I graduated from there." Just to see them now, and just to hear them as they get older, say they've never been on a campus like the Tacoma Campus.

But the Tacoma Campus is another bedroom in the house of Evergreen State College. As long as I live, that's exactly what it will be called. The Tacoma Campus, which is simply another room on another site.

If you aren't careful, eventually they will always want to name it Maxine Mimms Learning Center. That's sort of tricky because you don't want to ever give that name away from this community. You always want it to be Evergreen, and you always want it to carry the image of coordinated studies,

group contracts, individual contracts with the spine being straight that that's what they did on the campus, and that's why it's there. I don't care that's about the site. I don't care if it never had a brick.

Er: Right now, there's a tendency—using Dr. Sheppard's vocabulary—that trying to standardize not just the Olympia Campus trying to standardize this other four-year college—there was a tendency to try to make Tacoma matching Evergreen's vocabulary.

Mimms: Right.

Er: In terms of standardizing of students' writings and vocabulary. That's on one side. On the other side, we now in Tacoma have more and more non-African American students. What do you see the advantages and disadvantages of asserting it is a Black campus? It is Evergreen's Black college.

Mimms: The Black campus can have 1,000,473 blue-haired white people. I don't care. But the concept of courage, hospitality, coordinated studies, brilliance, indigenous genius, giveback, autobiographical has to be the foundational principles that it lives on.

I want more Black students, but if the gentrification—you have to understand, you never know, when you're talking about politicians and greed. If you look at what has happened throughout the country, that's an absolutely beautiful building. If you've got mainly white people moving back into your inner cities, that campus, by design, located on Sixth Avenue across from the hospital, will be totally white in another five years.

Because white people are not crazy. If you can walk your dog on Sprague Street, you can walk your dog up to the street where the campus is. Anybody white is not going to not go there, because if you graduate from the Tacoma Campus and you're white, and you just know what that campus is all about, you're going to be hired because the diversity is built into the design, so your experience is already there.

What we have to do is not get so—and that's what I've got to help Olga Inglebritson with, and Tyrus Smith. They are always bombarded with the standard and the structure. I understand that. But what they've got to do is break frame. They're young enough to. As long as I'm alive, I'm going to support them.

But that building needs to be open. You cannot have an urban campus with it being closed on Friday night and Saturday. You've got to have Saturday, after I've finished shopping at the market and Costco, to come by and put my onions and potatoes down on the floor and meet with a group. You've got 50,000 tables in there. You've got to have that building utilized.

George Bridges, the President, says, "We've got to find the money." See, you've got to be careful about money. Money is going to always be a problem. But you've got to say, "No. The integrity

of why I'm looking"—can you believe that a building that size is closed on Saturday, with all the things we need to do? We can go from person to person to person.

We can go to the union and ask them, "Can you give us in-kind a janitor?" You can give Selma, Joye's daughter who lives right around the corner, the key to open it and close it down. You can train people to be responsible so that there can be access.

A building of that nature is closed? We have nowhere to go in that community. And you know who's taking all the slack? UPS [University of Puget Sound]. UPS is open every Saturday. They just brought in Julianne Malveaux. We used to be able to partner with this, but I know what the new President—be careful. It has to be open.

Er: In the neighborhood, you have UW-T. It has 7,000 students. That is essentially a competitor. PLU now has a Black woman as Provost. That's probably someone they are looking at to team with or something.

Mimms: The thing that not any of them—UW-T and PLU and UPS—they cannot beat our intimacy. They can't.

Sheppard: And the question that Dr. Lee asked about, what if the campus gets more—well, it's almost more Black now—more white? How does that affect our pedagogy? White students say this to me, "If it wasn't for the intimacy that I find so unique here at the Tacoma Campus."

It used to be sometimes we would say, "I don't know what to say. Everything is Black." You know what they say now, white people? Maybe one or two. That's always going to happen because we live in a world that perpetuates you to say that. But whites did say, "If it wasn't for the intimacy that I found right here, I would not be able to get through my mother dying."

I'm not just talking about school. I'm talking about life. So as long as I'm there, I don't care who the student body is, it will be fired in the kiln of Black culture a la Dr. Maxine Mimms, because there's a lot of Black culture that you chose, the areas of Black culture that sustains us.

Mimms: Because the indigenous nature of us is that we're geniuses.

Sheppard: That's why you got out. [laughing]

Mimms: Is that the way it is?

Sheppard: Well, kind of, but go ahead.

Mimms: We have to realize the indigenous nature of Black culture. It is genius. It's brilliant. Those on the receiving end are forced to sit up a little straighter, a little taller. Lean back. Slow down the stride. Reduce the aggression. Reduce the greed.

All of those things are built into the model, and the model is a model that's been here so long that the confusion on the Olympia Campus is—that's why Olympia, with the Native American program, and the Tacoma program, is marginalized. It's a very simple thing. If someone could just get to the microphone and centralize it.

Everything on the Tacoma Campus needs to be emulated on the Olympia Campus. It's just the opposite. We don't need to emulate what's on the—Olympia is an obsolete world. Our world is a world that faces the truth of a Donald Trump; faces the truth of a Jeff Sessions. We've been through a Donald Trump, so we've got some literature in our spirits about who they are. We've got the literature.

I have met one million Donald Trumps, 500 Jeff Sessions, trillions of Betsy DeVoses—I'm 89—so they're not fearful. I have to be sure not to ignore them, but to say, include them in your repertoire of understanding. "Don't be cynical. Let me hope you become mayor. Let me help you run for the Legislature. That's my role. C'mon, come down to my house and let's have a glass of water or drink some Scotch, and you apply for being the President."

"C'mon, Oprah. Be President, girl. Run." "No, I can't Maxine. I don't have the experience." "Oprah, Donald doesn't have the experience either."

I have to remind people that we've got the experience to do everything. My role is just to have a space for them to come to practice. That's what the Tacoma Campus is—practicing my brilliance. It's so beautiful.

I've told George Bridges that's obsolete.

Er: Can you elaborate why you think Evergreen and your early days are so important for your personal achievements, and now, you say it's absolutely [unintelligible 00:31:38]?

Mimms: Because when we first started, we were always threatened with closing us down, so we were able to fight as a bonded group and feel good about ourselves. We had the identifiable enemy, which was the Legislature, so we had to work together. We don't have any more enemies. We haven't defined them.

They're trying to have a structure. All of the design, you need to get back to three things. What does independent study mean? What does group contract mean? What does coordinated studies mean in today's world, not what happened blah blah blah.

And then, who is doing that? The only campus that's doing the original stuff is the Tacoma Campus, because we're able to define white people as being able to criticize us. We adhere more to the original model than anybody because we certainly don't want to be out of line with what originally was talked about, so I don't know what that is up there.

Er: Yeah, and the amazing thing is that George Bridges challenged faculty. “How can you, in your good conscience, teaching O-level class at Evergreen?”

Mimms: What kind of class?

Er: O-level, so freshman and senior in the same class learning consciousness.

Mimms: He doesn’t believe that?

Er: He doesn’t believe that. He was challenging faculty. “How can you do that and then call yourself a—”

Mimms: Well, the faculty messed themselves up. This is what has happened.

Er: [Unintelligible 00:33:36] different level.

Mimms: The faculty that’s white fought for a union. You must remember what white people will do. White people will vote for Donald Trump and not even know they just voted for him. They are so angry. His supporters are angry with the ACA. If I was Donald Trump, I would simply get rid of Obamacare and just call it Trumpcare and go on about my business. You could do this in a day. People wouldn’t even know the difference. Give himself the credit.

Evergreen voted for the union for somebody externally to tell them how to be a good educator. Now they’re trapped in their own prison. You build prisons to arrest and bring people in for punishment, not realizing that as a guard, you’re in prison also.

Er: I agree.

Mimms: We’ve got to think of a way, as we think of psychological incarceration. Incarceration is going on in many of our institutions. What Evergreen has done is it has incarcerated its philosophy. That’s what it has done. And it keeps struggling for money.

It says, go out and do an oral history project. It’s wonderful, but in the Archives, there are portfolios of lives that have meant a lot to the history. Why aren’t some of those portfolios being used as history books, or an excerpt? Why aren’t there themes from, let’s say, what was Rudy Martin famous for? I don’t know. Why isn’t there a theme? Didn’t some people say some important things on that campus?

If the Tacoma Campus—Joye, Gilda, all of you—can remember something I said, you will repeat it. So, the theme of who I am is built into the fabric of a community. So, when Eric Mercer’s grandchild comes, he can say, “My parents said such-and-such.” That child hears the same thing that I said to his grandparents years ago. “Thematically, what does this mean?”

I think Tacoma is just . . . it hurts me that I don’t see that many students, but I know it will happen. I think so.

Er: We'll do it.

Sheppard: We must, because in a blink of an eye, I don't care what they say, they will try to erase us. No, we'll do it.

Er: Yeah, I'm getting discouraged. I'm worried.

Sheppard: I'm not.

Er: I am worried, because after this spring, it's possible our student number will be under 100 next year, so that will be a significant impact on us in terms of the teaching faculty.

Sheppard: Does that mean Barbara or Peter [unintelligible 00:37:27]?

Mimms: We just have to recruit in a different way.

Sheppard: Yeah, we've got to get out there.

Er: Because more than half our students right now will be graduating, about 80 or 90 of them, and if we're still recruiting only 40 people....

Mimms: You're not going to get students unless the building is open Friday and Saturday.

Er: I agree.

Mimms: You've got to have cars parked in that parking lot, you've got to have activity, and you've got to have noise.

Sheppard: Yes! We finally have a sign. We have a sign now. "This is the Evergreen State College Tacoma." On the building. Big, long sign. Because there was no sign. People in the community didn't know.

Mimms: We've got to figure out a way, and I told Olga, because she's in school, and the model, nobody lives in Tacoma. We all live in different places now, and it's a different thing. We're not seen in the churches and in the stores.

For me personally, Olga and Gilda, I would take my tail over to every one of them hospitals and I would declare that you are not going to be a successful health practitioner unless you have some sociology. I would threaten them.

Sheppard: Be like Harriet Tubman. Put a gun to their heads and say, [crosstalk 00:39:02].

Mimms: There's something we've got to do.

Sheppard: We have to change—what you said—how we are recruiting. I think we need to be open Friday and Saturday. People need to know about us. There are many different—and I'm trying to do the prison-to-Tacoma pipeline.

Mimms: Do you have students enrolled?

Sheppard: Well, no. They start something and then stop.

Mimms: It's scary.

Sheppard: But I'm rotating into—Tyrus Smith is leaving and I'm going to be Tyrus.

Mimms: Is Tyrus quitting?

Sheppard: Not leaving. No, he's on sabbatical.

Er: This is our future. Next year, she's the leader.

Mimms: Where is he going?

Er: He's going to be there fall, and then he's going to do some research. When he comes back, he's going to go to Olympia to teach in a master's program, and then come back to us.

Er: It will be two years absence. What do you see in terms of the leadership in the Tacoma Campus?

Mimms: It's lousy.

Er: I mean in the past.

Sheppard: Somehow, you got [Short? 00:40:13]. Tell me who served [with Short?], and then talk about—

Mimms: You must remember, we're Black, and that's what I said, you have to have exotic leadership. Tyrus and Olga are sweet leadership. They're managers. They're not leaders. They know how to manage a structure. That's not what Tacoma needs.

Er: They need a visionary.

Mimms: When she goes in there and opens it up because they'll see Dr. Sheppard. And the rumor, once the rumor goes out, it'll change. No, Olga and Tyrus are just absolutely the sweetest people. They're just beautiful managers. You can't beat it. Hmm?

Sheppard: We're thinking about plans of what we're going to do.

Mimms: We need to turn this off?

Sheppard: No, no.

Er: No, no, no, no. You want me to pause it?

Sheppard: Can you pause it?

[Recording ends at 00:41:26]

[VOC_120103-949 begins 00:00:01]

Sheppard: Dr. Mimms, talk to us about leadership, Black leadership, Black women's leadership, like how Joye Hardiman came in, and how you grew in what you want. And does Tacoma really need Black women leadership?

Mimms: America had these Founding Fathers. White. And the Founding Fathers could not put on those clothes and go to the constitutional hall and do anything unless Mamie had prepared a good meal. Mamie made sure Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Hamilton and Mr. So-and-So had some eggs and a good meal.

Those were—they've put a title on it—called domestic workers and they called them maids and they called them slaves, all of the language that makes you feel poorly about your leadership. The creativity to scramble an egg; the non-reading people that could make beautiful cakes; the soap and water that cleaned the baseboards of a house long before Lysol; the pinching to put the right amount of salt, not understanding the measurement as Black women's leadership and institutional structures, and those places were called houses. It's always been there, and it always will be there.

The Tacoma Campus cannot survive without Black female leadership because the creativity is built into the DNA. No institution in America will ever survive without Black female leadership. What's lacking now—and that's why, in the recent weeks, there's so much anti-stuff about the President that they had to throw in Oprah's name to bring Black female leadership into the dialog for at least a couple of hours while we exhaled and inhaled the vulgarity of the system that's emerging.

Joye was an artist, I saw, that had real flamboyant nervous energy. I knew that energy, once it got loose, if you will, on that urban campus, it was going to be something to applaud. I knew once she combined that mind of hers with that energy, I was going to have exactly what I thought. Because I knew she had the energy and the intellect to take it to its next level, which was scholarship.

I was hoping that in the piece, as Joye left and you are there—I thought it was going to be Marcia would have her PhD by then—I knew the next piece that we needed, after you had the access and retention, Joye brought in the scholarship, and I thought of Marcia, and I really thought R.T. would have brought in would have allowed and pushed for the creativity. I wanted Joye to do that with poetry and stuff because I didn't want anybody to improvise just yet. I wanted it all to come naturally.

Lo and behold, when R.T. got there, she went into what white people like Black people to get into: trying to find money. Black people don't need to try to find money. Money will always come if the creativity manifests itself. We will always find money because we are always the leaders. We're always the leaders in language, we're always the leaders in text messaging with the clothesline, we're always the leaders in leadership. We're always the leaders. We just are. We were born that way. We're terrific.

I think about the Black woman and hats when I hear my mother tell the story that the jewelry was expensive, and you could make a hat. The competition wearing those hats became a thing. And

how beautiful it is now to see history manifesting itself and Black women in hats and their bodies in the church. We just love hats.

Sheppard: Dr. Mimms, I hear what you're saying about Black women in leadership, but you're not just any—any Black woman could come up and be a leader—because you grew Joye.

Mimms: Mm-hm.

Sheppard: There is some things that you looked for, because it's not all the Black culture that you're putting in Evergreen Tacoma Campus. You're putting the best of our culture.

Mimms: The Black women that I look for are those that are comfortable with their own autobiography. Not looking for their obituaries but looking for their autobiography.

The society makes us constantly ready to write our obituaries. We've got to be bold to write our auto—that's what I love about Maya—an autobiographical nature. Maya is famous for *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. When I went there last week, and there were 15 women that had had a class under Maya—one is a sheriff, another is a prosecutor—20 up there all are available in terms of they're now singing.

[Telephone rings and Dr. Mimms answers it at 00:07:28 and speaks till end of recording 00:07:37]

[VOC_120103-950 begins 00:00:01]

Mimms: The kind of leadership that I have always believed in for the Tacoma Campus is the Black woman that is ready and capable of receiving her own information about her autobiography; that her negatives can be worked through to make sure she has a positive image of self; that her courage is so powerful that whatever she finds herself insecure about, she's able to take that publicly with herself and manifest a direction.

I've been very blessed that I have seen that happen. I've known Barbara for years, and I've known Gilda. I've been blessed to have known many of the Black women that I trust with Evergreen.

You can even see it now that without that level of Black creativity, without the jazz leadership model, the respect for the solo, the respect for the instrumentation, the respect for the drummer who keeps the rhythm, the respect for all of the various notes, and then the autobiographical pedagogy that allows you to write the autobiography, but also turn to a friend in the intimacy and say, "I would like to write your biography."

When that dialog is there, you're going to have nothing but success. And only Black women can do that. Only.

Er: And the improvisation in jazz. The spontaneity.

Sheppard: Yes.

Mimms: Yes. Jazz is interesting. When you stand up, here's a whole group. All of the various instruments, when the saxophone player gets them to play the solo, they all pay attention to that saxophone player.

Er: Echoing.

Mimms: And when he finishes, there's something that they're able to do just with the tone and the ownership of those notes. Your students are your notes that you're developing out there. Johnny may be in the key of G. That doesn't mix with the key of A.

Then, when you think about instrumentation from my generation, I have lived long enough to see the young rappers come up and put lyrics to this instrumentation. Oh! And put the poetry. And then the opera comes about. Oh, I just go crazy.

That's what leadership is for me. Then you take your show on Broadway. And I think that's what Black women do. Strong, Black women, and Black women with creative leadership. I don't want them unless they can be creative.

If their discipline is sociology, I want them to come forth with everything they can find writing poetry. I want the poet to find everything that she or he can find in the psychology of the universe. I want all of those disciplines just mixed up in such a way that the human being is never ridiculed for just being.

Because academic discipline is nothing but alternative facts to your own life, and you've got to take those alternative facts, if you will, and make them the truth. Because if you're not careful, curriculum design can exclude you. You have to be able to have enough problem-thinking skills to say, "I'm not going to allow that for me autobiographically. I'm going to do something with this. I'm turning this around so I can get this much out of that." That's what the jazz musician does.

Er: That's beautiful.

Sheppard: Mm-hm.

Mimms: Teaching, if you stay with it long enough, there's such a joy. It is like jazz, for me.

Sheppard: It's all improvising. [laughing]

Mimms: It is. And you've got to respect yourself because when you go to do the solo of your trumpet or your saxophone, and all of your colleagues are listening to you play that solo, and you know you hit it, it's some beautiful stuff. Do you hear me?

You cannot do Black curriculum without the creativity of jazz. You just can't. That's why you find white teachers so often having difficulty with Black children. They're doing their notes and their thing and white people just want one key. The key of mm. And there's a lot of keys in there.

Er: Symphony is all about harmonies.

Mimms: But, girl, isn't that something?

Er: Exactly.

Sheppard: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mimms: Isn't that something, with all those instruments, with a pencil and a piece of paper and some lines, that thing can come out with a theme. And they make all these names. I often think of jazz musicians, who psychologically have such a rough time because the society just didn't have a place for them to be. I think often of children in the classroom. They just don't have a space or a place.

Like right now, Evergreen, what an opportunity for a liberal arts state college in a blue state could put in cultural courses in blah—gender studies, elderly studies, marginalizational studies, all of that—a brand-new vocabulary, building a whole vocabulary that allows [unintelligible 00:07:16]—and become a world leader in. What do we want to be world leaders in? We're a state. We're in a blue state. We're already hated by the politicians. What could we do?

Evergreen—are we in a race war? Are we in an economic war? What is this? What are we doing? We have no business running science as usual, Tacoma Campus as usual. We have the greatest opportunity. We're one of the last liberal arts colleges founded in the '60s.

What is it doing in terms of boldness? Why isn't it bold? Why aren't we looking at new ways? What is the new vocabulary? Why aren't we saying, ha, bright news or whatever. Why aren't we saying, "alternative facts"? What does that mean? Why aren't we saying we are specializing in the whole? Why aren't we inviting every journalist in the United States of America to the campus for a journalist camp? Publicly. Every small paper, whatever it is, would come.

Run a whole curriculum on what's the vocabulary that helps us look at peace? Is peace a new word now? What does the word Middle East mean? Why do we have something called a Middle East?

Sheppard: Middle of what? Right.

Mimms: Middle of what? What is it? If you get rid of ISIS and the hatred is built so deeply, how do you prevent another group worse than ISIS? You had Al Qaeda. They hated us. ISIS hates us. Is there any prevention language that we have here? What do our institutions—what do you mean by commerce now? Secretary of State. HUD. Why do you have—

Donald Trump is the last Baby Boomer President. He's 70. There's a new demographic coming in. What is that demographic? My gosh. Millennials. What does that mean? Should I be scared of them? Are they a disease? I don't know what that means. Evergreen isn't being bold and doing nothing. Just regular. Mm.

Er: Now that you're retired—if you accept that word or not—do you think your life is going to a different place aside from the teaching, or are you continuing your teaching?

Mimms: I will continue to teach even after I die. This is not a discipline for me, this is my life. This is my heart. This is my bloodstream. This is my circuits. This is every piece of me. This is not a job.

Sheppard: Dr. Mimms, I remember the Maxine Mimms Academy. Dr. Mimms would take these kids, these children, where they were expelled from public schools, and not only have teachers there to teach them about whatever they needed in order to graduate, or move another grade, she'd have them come to our class. You remember. You were there.

Er: Yeah.

Sheppard: The students would sit in our classes.

Er: First row.

Sheppard: Yes. I remember one student going up to Les Purce, who was the President, and saying, "You need to pay your teachers more. They're very good." [laughter] I'll never forget him. He came to him, Les Purce, he and this little white kid, and they were really good friends. I can't think of their names. He said, "You need to pay your teachers more. They are really very good."

Mimms: You know what those students taught me? They didn't even understand the vocabulary of campus and professors. None of that language had ever been introduced.

"What are professors?" And I said, "To profess." One little boy—I'll never forget, he must have been about 14—said, "You must have to confess before you profess." I'll never forget it as long as I live. Isn't that something? "You must have to confess." He'd been going to church, and he'd heard about confession. He said, "I wonder if you have to confess before?" I said, "I'll bet you do." He said, "Yeah." Then the other student said, "You know what? Our teachers, that's what's wrong. That's why we've been expelled. They haven't confessed nothing." And they went on with the dialog. It was powerful. "Do you have to confess before you profess?"

Sheppard: You just unleashed something in him to make him define his brilliance.

Er: One of your earlier students who graduated from Evergreen eventually, remember that woman, Brianna?

Mimms: I know.

Er: She was brilliant. She eventually graduated from our program. "I remember Dr. Mimms. I was I was a delinquent." [laughing]

Mimms: She was . . . ooh.

Sheppard: I remember, Dr. Mimms, once there was this one young man, and he was just—woo! He never handed papers in. He was just terrible, and I would say, “Dr. Mimms, I just can’t teach. I don’t know what to do.” You told me, “You’re not a teacher if you can’t teach it.”

Tell me what you meant. I knew, but I want you to talk about that. It’s that inclusion part, and I was going about it wrong. I was trying to teach him. I needed to profess. [laughing]

Mimms: What I was so impressed with you early was—this is before you got equipment—I said, “Gilda, what are you doing?” You would say, “Vit-va-boom.” It blew me away because before you got equipment, you had already become a filmmaker. The rhythm of making the film was vit-va-boom, and I don’t know whether it was equipment one or equipment two, but you had the image of the filmmaker. Vit-va-boom.

That’s all I know about filmmakers is that they are vit-va-booms. You said it all the time. I thought that meant that you were making films without the equipment, but the image was there. Isn’t that powerful?

Sheppard: Mm-hm.

Mimms: Which means that when you’re a little thing, you’re always dreaming about going to school. You get into this space, and someone tells you, “This is not a place that is hospitable.” You’re always dreaming about going to college, and college isn’t the place that you find joy, and it should be joy in there.

Sheppard: I remember now. You said, “Because you’re trying to teach, and that’s not what this child needs.” I said, “I need to listen.” You looked at me, and what I loved was that you encouraged me to figure it out for myself. And I kept teaching—teaching—instead of sitting back and just letting this young man talk to me about what he needed.

I’ll never forget that. I remember he had been in a gang, and I kept talking about gangs, and you said, “If you go to the gang as a problem, you will never get a solution.”

Mimms: No.

Sheppard: You told me that. You said, “So, why are you talking about this? Stop being a sociologist and be a strong, Black woman.” She felt me.

Er: There’s no difference between sociology and a strong, Black woman. [laughter]

Sheppard: She’s always telling it right.

Mimms: Yep. She is always a strong, Black woman, and there are times she cannot be the sociologist.

Sheppard: Yeah.

Mimms: And you have to know the difference. The difference is a thin line. She was born a sociologist. It didn't just come to her through the training. Once she recognized that she is a Black woman, then she can accept the discipline of sociology.

Er: She agrees.

Sheppard: [Laughing]

Mimms: She can accept it. That's why you have so much pain when you go to do graduate school research. You haven't been able to accept your own natural discipline and it becomes frightening because you're competing with somebody at another school, somebody who's over at Princeton doing a level of research in sociology and you're at Yale, you're frightened. You hope the journal will take your article. And you're constantly getting away from yourself.

Er: It seems your conceptual contribution in terms of what education system, all of us in the business of education professionally. Then formal education, as it is analyzed here, seems to go against the grain of the individual.

Mimms: Right.

Er: The heroes, the leaders, the personal idiosyncratic supposed to be. How, as an educator, you fulfilled both roles of giving them formal education to get a degree, get a job, and in the meantime, help them to recognize their own power.

Mimms: The development of a model, an Evergreen State College model, if you're part of a planning team, and let's say, you're 17 white men and one Black man, and you're trying to do a model that's different, and you've been protected with alternative facts [chuckles] and fake news, what they did, they were just emotionally devastated by the language.

Here's a State Legislature saying, "If we're going to give you this money, you must be bold and different." Those white men didn't know how to be bold and different. They knew how to be the same with some watered-down language on something.

But the few that said, "Oh, we will not," what they had to do in their lives was eliminate everything. We will not have a football team. We will not have a teacher's program. We will not have this. We will not have that.

What they didn't have the skills in doing was to say that for six months, and then turn around and say, "We will have." "We will have." "We will have." Then the balance would have been there. So, they spent years on what we will not do, and now they're on what we will do, and it's backfiring. Because what somebody needs to remind this group is we will not. This group is saying, "We will." And they've got a union applauding them, saying, "Ah, that's good. That's good."

So, we're way out of balance. We were out of balance when we first started because "We will not." Then we had to spend time because we had the natural enemy, the Legislature. Now, we're on "We shall be." White people think "We shall be" standardizes. You'd have a standard.

The Tacoma Campus is saying, "We're not interested in that. We're trying to look at another approach. It's just not bold enough." And everything is maintenance-oriented right now. Let's maintain the status quo.

Er: Because there's no new vision.

Mimms: White people cannot have vision because their experiences—okay, the only way you can have a vision and you're white is you cannot go to the discipline. You've got to go to the hobby. When you go to the hobby, then the boldness will occur.

A hobby often is your academic discipline. But where are you going to go and say, "I majored in my hobby"? Nobody's going to accept that. But all of those faculty need to be put on a probation list until they're able to write two paragraphs about their hobbies.

Then you have your hobby. You go into the Archives and you find someone else that you think has the hobby, or you look at it. Then you take the oral history project, and you match up all the hobbies. Once these hobbies come to the surface [sharp intake of breath] I will see how much I am like you in terms of enjoying whatever. Then we can overlay all that with the discipline.

Right now, it's just a bunch of boring "Let's find a diversity course." You've got trans people being forced to talk about a bodily function called bathrooms. That's embarrassing. That's embarrassing to me at 89. And these are grown people.

You have the President of the college saying, "We want to hire a diversity coordinator." I'm embarrassed by that because that's one person that you place on the—the third floor is totally white. Tomorrow, Monday, you could call a cabbie, you could call Tacoma, and you could have all of you all sit down, and say, "I would like to recommend So-and-So and So-and-So for an internship for two weeks on the third floor. Two weeks."

Bring anything [dark? 00:24:09] and pale skin on the third floor and say publicly, in the literature, "We're looking at a way to deal with diversity." Snap a picture of it. Throw it in a magazine. It would change the [unintelligible 00:24:26]. Aim for two weeks.

You take the money and those interns—you tell the student from Tacoma, "We will pay for your next quarter's books." Tell the students on that campus, "We will buy all the books. Intern for two weeks and we'll buy whatever, or we'll pay tuition."

We don't need a diversity person. You take the money and hire somebody to open the campus in Tacoma on Saturdays.

Sheppard: Exactly. C'mon with it. Because what is that person going to come up with?

Mimms: Nothing.

Sheppard: And if we tell him or her—and I think it's going to be this Black woman—

Mimms: You did hear somebody?

Sheppard: I hear that there's this Black woman that they're looking at. I don't know. All we've got to do is tell her and then she'll say, "I think the campus should be open Saturdays." [laughing] We've been telling them that. We've been telling Olympia that when the faculty work as advisors, you can get more retention. Now, they have an advising council, but they never give us credit for it as a model.

Mimms: The only model for the Olympia Campus is Tacoma. Period.

Sheppard: Yeah, you're right about that.

Mimms: The only thing that's thwarting us now is we're not open. We can take the money from the diversity and put it in for years. Open the Tacoma Campus, increasing students, and you've got it.

Sheppard: It's almost like, do you think this is a conspiracy to get rid of us? I'm an old, seventies, paranoid person. [laughing]

Mimms: It's a way to tell you, "Make sure you aren't in a program that's not valuable." And you'll have to fight that.

Sheppard: Yes.

Mimms: You have to fight the language of deconstructing a model while you're part of that model, and you have to be very careful that that doesn't happen. And they're using Olga and Tyrus to do that. It's not deliberate, but they would rather not open the Tacoma Campus on Saturday by bringing in a diversity coordinator, and then spending a whole year collecting data. And putting it where?

Sheppard: That's correct. Evidence-based.

Mimms: But the evidence is based. You all have a graduation every year.

Sheppard: That's right! And retention is better, and we can't get any money because our retention is so good. That can slap.

Dr. Mimms, there's something about you. There's something about passion and magic I think you've got. There's something about magic with you. What role does magic have in all of this?

Er: Magicians never give up their secrets.

[Telephone rings and Dr. Mimms answers it]

[VOC_120103-951 begins 00:00:01]

Mimms: Chantelle. I thought I would talk to them someday seriously about my transition. Chantelle said, “Oh, Grandma, that doesn’t bother me. You’re magic. I’ll just press a button and you’ll come back.”

Quantitative physics is us. The only reason we have quantitative is because of Black people. We are magic. No way we couldn’t be. You can’t be brought over with the life of bondage, and if it’s true that the cells have memory, and you end up with something called slavery—years and years and years—and nobody knows how we got out of it.

People will say education. Emancipation. No, it was pure magic. It was pure physics. We pushed a button, and we got out of it. Nobody can explain it. And I ain’t giving up the secret. Only way you’re going to know the secret is to major in physics quantitatively.

That’s why they had to say to Black children, “You don’t understand math.” Because once they understand quantitative physics and its connection to poetry, and its connection to music, they will understand the secret of magic, and they will understand the button that was pushed by their ancestors, and how we got out of it. We will never, ever return to it. That’s the confusion with the fake news.

Er: I just wrote a poem last week.

Mimms: About physics?

Er: No, about pressed buttons. It was talking about all the abducted girls. All the women being abused all over the world. And I wish there was a button they can press.

Mimms: They can press it.

Er: Because you know in the major new buildings, elevator, everywhere, there’s the emergency button, so where’s the button—

Mimms: Have you ever watched a little child? Have you watched children growing up? Little children two and three years old will see a mark on a cabinet, or a mark on the wall, and they will go to that mark and they will say, “Ouch.” And they will draw that.

It’s just a bar, and they’ll draw back that thing, and you’ll say, “Who did that?” They’ll look around the room and say, “Daddy.” “Mommy.” They know that that mark hurt that wall. “Ouch!” they’ll say.

That’s the magic. When we pressed that button on slavery, it was “ouch.” When they pressed that button on abuse, it’s “ouch.”

Sheppard: My grandmother used to talk about her grandmother, who was in slavery. She said, “But the only way she survived it is that she got happy.” That’s when you get the Holy Ghost. She would get happy.

You know what they used to say about Harriet Tubman. They said that she would meld into the trees. Of course, she was psychic and had epilepsy. She'd have a seizure and they'd just wait.

Mimms: That was the magic.

Sheppard: But I remember—I know you're magic because there's two incidents happened to me when I got my PhD. I said, "This was the first time I ever had a Black teacher." You know what you said to me? You said, "You're going to regret you said that."

I went home. You came over to my house, and the head of my PhD committee was there. I went to get glasses for wine. Do you remember? I went to get the glasses.

Mimms: All the glasses broke.

Sheppard: All the glasses fell to my face, and I had a circle of black all around me, and I was on a stool. I heard Dr. Mimms get up. "You've got to hum that tune." And you and Professor Phillips got up and started sweeping that glass. She kind of got me off. You said, "I'm going to sweep the glass," and you just swept the glass. Do you remember that?

Mimms: Mm-hm.

Sheppard: That's exactly what happened. I am not lying. Then, when I came from Ghana, when I was on that long fellowship, and I came straight to you—this was in church—and I spoke in tongues. I was trying to go like this. I know it's true, so I don't give a care what anybody else thinks. [laughing] But I got [unintelligible 00:05:58], but only around her.

Mimms: That's the magic. Viv vra. That's before the equipment. And whatever everybody wants her to do is wait for the equipment before she vips vops in their own image, so she won't have the magic.

The stress, then—"How am I going to get the money to buy such and such a machine?" I needed \$963—and when she finishes with herself, all the beauty of the vip vop is gone, and we don't get a filmmaker. We get her always filling out the papers to get the equipment and never the filmmaker. That's the magic.

Sheppard: I had to keep speaking in tongues to keep hanging out with here. [laughter] I said, "I may never come back to this church," and the pastor came around, and she said, "I don't want you to be afraid. You just need to know that you can do anything you want to do. That's what that means. That's all it means. You can do whatever you want to do."

Mimms: And look how successful you are.

Sheppard: Because I got bold. I got real bold. "I need \$100,00." I was driving home, and I had to stop and get out of the car and go screaming. It was crazy. I was thinking I'd get \$50,00.

Mimms: And that's what I wanted George Bridges to experience, but I can't get him to move out of the comfort zone of maintenance. So, they're just going to keep hiring people and hiring people, thinking it's going to correct, and it's not.

Er: I don't think he has read it.

Sheppard: I don't think so either. Just the other day, they were trying to get bell hooks to come for graduation. I know her, so I called her, but she was out of town, but she'll be back. That's to say Tacoma is really jamming. They're calling on us to get bell hooks, and we got Bryan Stevenson because we wrote the proposal to get Bryan Stevenson. You know what he said? "Remind me again who Bryan Stevenson is."

That's our Common Reads for next year. This Black man, who is a legal scholar, oh, lord, I couldn't get over it. I'm sorry, George. [laughing]

Mimms: Is [Vaughan? 00:09:01] coming?

Sheppard: Yeah, he's coming in September. He is something else. He's brilliant.

Mimms: You all got Bryan coming to the Tacoma Campus.

Sheppard: Mm-hm. Yes! Bobby Seale is coming the first Tuesday in April. A friend of mine who knows Bobby Seale said, "He's coming to Washington State. Do you want him, girl?" I said, "Yeah!" Bobby Seale is coming, Bryan Stevenson is coming, bell hooks is coming. Okay.

Er: Any major events or crises, turmoils, tensions?

Sheppard: What do you think about Joe Olander? [laughing] I loved Joe Olander.

Er: Anything about the early days.

Sheppard: Yeah, anything where this is the time when I was like umph! Something that stands out that was a challenge.

Er: And your own contributions.

Mimms: I think we had—I can't think of his name now, but his son drowned. Many, many of our faculty got divorces, which I thought, we were so caught up in building the school, we became married to each other—the dialog—and we neglected our families. Hairy divorces. I thought that was interesting. And, as I reflect on it, it is interesting.

Er: Were there any affairs?

Mimms: Oh, a lot of affairs.

Er: They were human. [laughing] Do you remember Joe Olander?

Mimms: Yeah.

Sheppard: I remember when I first saw him, I'd never heard of [unintelligible 00:11:11] caused by a revolution.

Mimms: The thing that I think is interesting, from my perspective, is you had Charlie McCann, who had a style of access and flexibility where his door was always open. Everybody had behavior that was rebellious, if you will. Charlie was an English major out of Washington State. I don't know if it was WSU or what. But he had a very kind, open personality. We were allowed to be the divas.

I don't remember Charlie—he had strong opinions, but the “no” did not mean his “no,” his will had to be on yours, so we were able to do a lot.

After Charlie, there was Dan Evans. I had known Dan Evans before he was Governor. I think we needed someone flashy and popular so we wouldn't get closed down. In fact, I just got a note from Dan Evans the other day congratulating me on this Martin Luther King award.

Sheppard: Yes, you won the [Tacoma] Martin Luther King, Jr. [Community Service] Award.

Mimms: Yeah.

Sheppard: Prestigious award.

Mimms: Yeah, the City of Tacoma.

Sheppard: “The City of Tacoma presents the 29th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday celebration to Dr. Maxine Mimms. 2017 Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award.” Beautiful.

Mimms: Then Dan Evans went to the Senate. After Dan came Joe Olander, who was a raw personality, and was very, very supportive of Tacoma. Very supportive. We got more money under him. We were able to bring in many, many, many speakers from throughout the country. Joe Olander said “yes” to Tacoma every time we made a request, and they got rid of him in Olympia. [laughter]

Er: Because of his support for . . . ?

Mimms: . . . fake news.

Sheppard: . . . fake news. He didn't have the things he said he had. [laughing] He was flashy. He was handsome.

Mimms: Flashy.

Sheppard: He would come in and say, “Evergreen is at the head of the revolution.” We were like, who the heck is this dude?

Mimms: He was very good for Tacoma. The Tacoma community loved him. He was a flashy Italian male that dressed. He fit in with the culture at that time in Tacoma, not down here. After that, I don't remember who else came. Oh, the lady.

Sheppard: Jane.

Mimms: Jane Jervis.

Sheppard: I liked Jane. She was good to Tacoma.

Mimms: Uh-huh. I didn't get to know her very well.

Sheppard: Then comes good old Les.

Mimms: Les [Purce]. And now we have this boy, George. Les, I think, brought in a lot of money, from what I understand.

Sheppard: He was good for Tacoma.

Mimms: Uh-huh. Always, yeah.

Er: And he clearly had a personal like of Tacoma. Every time he'd come to the campus, he had a different demeanor.

Sheppard: Yeah.

Er: The way he cut his hair. So comfortable.

Mimms: Always.

Sheppard: He was so happy to come here. He sees [Mishah? 00:15:49] and I and he says, "Girl, let's go. Let's all go out." God bless him.

Mimms: Les?

Sheppard: Yeah.

Mimms: Mm-hm. Sweet man.

Er: Can you comment on the status of women and people of color on the faculty?

Mimms: Now?

Er: Yeah, or in the past. This is one of the questions.

Mimms: We had more. I don't think you have any down there now. I think Phyllis [last name? 00:16:17] is there. I think [R. T.? 00:16:19] is in Olympia. Isn't that it? And George Freeman is still there. [Kevin? And last name? 00:16:23].

Sheppard: There's this [Chico Ferguson? 00:16:28].

Mimms: A Black guy?

Sheppard: He's Asian and Black.

Er: [Unintelligible 00:16:34].

Sheppard: Are you serious?

Mimms: What?

Sheppard: What does he say he is?

Er: I don't know.

Sheppard: Human being. I wonder why he teaches African American everything, but refuses to identify? [laughing]

Er: Maybe I interpreted it wrong because he was at the old faculty retreat. I was there.

Mimms: They still have retreats?

Er: I think it's only new faculty.

[Telephone rings and Dr. Mimms answers it at 00:17:05 and speaks till end of recording 00:17:11]