

David Milne
Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal
The Evergreen State College oral history project
March 16, 2023
FINAL

[Begin Part 1 of 2 of David Milne on March 16, 2023]

Fiksdal: This is Susan Fiksdal and I'm here with David Milne on March 16, 2023, for our second interview. Dave, thank you very much for agreeing to meet again.

At the end of our last meeting, you brought up your book, which you published post-retirement, and I want to hear a lot about that. However, I'd like to steer you back to the beginning years at Evergreen, when you taught in large programs with lots of folks and try to get a sense of what it was like to teach back then.

I know you had to have a lot of colleagues. That was the idea. Maybe it was different for you. You had a lot of science programs with labs and field trips. I wonder if you could tell us about some of the programs you're most proud of and maybe some of the colleagues you worked with, and what you learned from them, and what they may have learned from you?

Milne: Sure. It's a pleasure. The very first program that I was in was the first academic year and it was called Political Ecology. The program coordinator was Ed Kormondy, who a year later went on to become the provost. Fred Tabbutt was there from Reed College; Richard Anderson, a lawyer from Arizona, was a member of the team; this is where I first met Oscar Soule, a botanist; and me. I think that's five. The idea was to examine the interaction between industrial society and the natural world. It was a broad thing. Law could play a part, chemistry could play a part, ecology could play a part.

Basically, we divided up. We gave lectures on sectors, on things that bear on that central theme. Everybody sat in on the lectures of everybody else, and it was always a large audience. We got to know the students immediately. We had some contact with them the week before the classes began.

I must say, the students in that class were the most altruistic, save-the-world-oriented young men and women that I have ever encountered at Evergreen, with the exception of my very last class.

[laughing]

Fiksdal: That's amazing. You had a sandwich there.

Milne: Yeah. They were fun. I was closer to their age then, and so were the other faculty, and we really got along as a huge, happy family.

The students themselves were from various backgrounds. Some of them were from out of state. Some were like the daughter of a logger, who brought her dad's perspective on ecology to this. Son of a schoolteacher, who went on to become a school principal himself. Some students with sort of philosophical outlooks, disciples of some guru whose name I've forgotten. [laughing]

We began this class the first week by going to a state park camp at Goldendale, Washington, because the main building that was going to be our classroom—namely, the library—was not finished yet, and the contractors were finishing it up.

Off we went. We spent a week at this camp. It's at a high elevation in south Washington, so it's very cold down there. That was just a blast. Everybody loved it, and it was a great mixer, get to know your fellow students, get to know your faculty, that you could possibly ask for. We really had fun.

Fiksdal: Did you have a concept at that time of a retreat, a program retreat? Because that's part of what it became, in a sense.

Milne: It was a retreat without even a day to plan it. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Not even a day to plan it. I see, yes.

Milne: We all thought we would be starting out in our classrooms. No, no, no, no. It went fine. We had entertainment at night. The students put it on, and the faculty put it on, and that was a blast. There are things about that I still remember.

A friend of mine was a Vietnam vet. He was not in the class, but he happened to be visiting and dropped in. He gave a talk about what it was like to be in Vietnam and showed some slides of landscapes that had been blasted by bombs. That was pretty sobering, but it was a reminder that there's serious stuff as well as fun.

Fiksdal: And the war was still going on.

Milne: Yes, it was, '71 that was.

Fiksdal: That's amazing to have someone come in at that time.

Milne: He was a very personable guy of my age. He'd been right in the middle of it. He really brought a very nonpolitical perspective to it. Here's what's going on. Here's what it's doing to people on both sides. That was valuable. That might actually have been our first lecture in the entire class.

We came back from that, and we wanted to have fieldwork that included— I think we were working in collaboration with other faculty on some of this. Some of the fieldwork consisted of going down and observing the Legislature, sitting in the visitors' gallery, and seeing that. I believe maybe not that year, but later, actually giving some testimony.

Fred Tabbutt and I got in contact with some people who wanted a survey of the marine life of Hood Canal. In the fall, the low tides are all at night, so we drove up there in freezing weather with the entire class, a few at a time, and surveyed shores.

We invited some Fisheries people to join us. They wanted the work done, and they were happy to help, so they came with us. We would all stand around while they would show us, this is a steamer clam, this is a softshell clam.

Fiksdal: Oh, my gawd. In the middle of the night?

Milne: Yeah, coming home freezing.

Fiksdal: I hate to say it, but you went to Purdue. It's freezing there. Of course, you didn't have to be outside all the time.

Milne: Right. [laughter] No, this was not like Indiana. But still . . .

Fiksdal: Still, you're out in the elements.

Milne: But it was energizing. Everybody loved being out there. We learned a bunch and we actually compiled a report, which is still available. It's called the Hood Canal Report. Later on in the spring, we went to a professional meeting in Oregon, and the students gave a presentation on what they found. This was astounding for freshmen.

Fiksdal: It is! In one year! That says a lot about the faculty. You were doing real work that was necessary work.

Milne: Right, and people were interested in what we were finding, and the students learned a heck of a lot. So did I, actually, and so did Fred.

Fiksdal: But those students weren't 18 years old. Right? A lot of them were transfer students and older. Right?

Milne: Oh, no, no. A lot of them were less than 18 years old.

Fiksdal: Oh, really?

Milne: Yeah, and they were serious. They loved fun. But I think that they loved learning also, the way we were doing it, and they could see that the faculty was all very collegial. We all had different backgrounds.

So, what else about that first year? Fred Tabbutt made a video, which is now in DVD form. I think it was called Political Ecology, and he interviewed the faculty, including me, and somebody filmed him. Boy, do we ever look young now. [laughter]

One of the things I remember about the college around us is the first year, it was really under siege by several legislators. Their posture was that they wanted to close the college. I don't know if

they really intended that, but they talked that way, and they made some moves that way, and there was a sense of threat to the place.

Also, my sense was that some of the other programs had become very frayed around the edges and were not the fun experience that we having. So, there were requests from faculty members who would drop in on our class and ask if we could suspend the class and discuss the threat to college. We would say, “No. We’re here to learn. This is working. We’re going to demonstrate that it will work, and we’re going to proceed.” That atmosphere of threat from the outside continued for several years, but it abated as time went by.

The next year, I was in a six-faculty program. That included me, Richard Anderson again, a young gal geographer—her name can be found in the Archives—Jeff Kelly—I met him for the first time; that was his first year, I think, at the college—Rob Knapp. Rob had been there, I believe, the year before. And, Gil Salcedo.

Again, we had an amazingly good class. This time, it was a really different mix. It was a class full of students—still large—and they were struggling with questions like, “Who am I?” [laughing] “What is reality?” [laughing]

Fiksdal: What was the topic of your program?

Milne: It was very, very close to Political Ecology, but it had a different name. Human Ecology.

Fiksdal: It’s interesting it attracted students who—

Milne: Yeah, the next year’s class was . . .

Fiksdal: . . . completely different.

Milne: And they regarded themselves as screwed up. That was their self-image. I remember there was one guy in the class, a guy named Glen, and some of these ones, in a good-humored way, struggling with the idea of “I’m messed up. I’m working on it.” They referred to Glen as the only normal guy in the class. [laughing]

We continued the same thing. We didn’t have a huge, focused project, like the Hood Canal project, but we did get out a lot on fieldtrips. Now, it’s becoming a blur as to whether some of this happened in that class or classes to follow. But again, it was a really successful class with an entirely different read of students. Boy, it was a model that really worked.

After that, I don’t know if I was ever again in another six or five-faculty class. Three-faculty classes, yes. Two-faculty classes, often. Sometimes me with a standard college class. I was on the faculty hiring committee a number of times.

Late in my tenure at Evergreen, I remember we were looking for someone in the natural sciences. By this time, some of the faculty who were intensely interested in research had come along, so they had a research orientation. They always made sure it was a learning experience for the students, but they had that focus that, at the beginning of the college, we thought, no, research just gets in the way of teaching.

We interviewed some candidates. There was kind of a division. I think I was the oldest one on the committee. There were several candidates that year that were ecologically oriented, and they did excellent ecological work in the tropics, often it was, as it turned out. And they were good. They were good candidates. All of them were.

Most of the ones that we interviewed had research interests, so the research-oriented faculty were attracted by that. I remember there was this one young woman, and she would have been perfect for the first year at Evergreen. She brought a serious, studious approach to ecology, also in the tropics—Central America—but she also had that original Evergreen spirit—I'll try anything, I'll teach with anybody. Not so much as [were] the other more focused candidates.

The thing that I remember about her, one time she was speaking with the committee, and for some reason, in her research site, some tapirs came along—big animals—so here was this pool, and the tapirs went in it, and they were enjoying the water. She said she couldn't resist. She took off all her clothes and dove in the pool with the tapirs. [laughing]

Fiksdal: In her interview she talked about this?

Milne: Yes. And I thought, she belongs here. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Yes!

Milne: But she did not get the offer. The faculty's philosophy was shifting a little bit as time went by. My very last class, it was a two-quarter thing. The first quarter consisted of Amy Cook, and she had been one of my students and she had come back.

And Tom Rainey. I'd never, ever had a chance to teach with Tom Rainey. And Bret Weinstein. He was brand new. He was there as an adjunct faculty because his wife had been hired as a regular faculty. As arranged, Amy went to a different program after the first quarter, and they invited me to join Tom and Bret in the second quarter.

This was a class of about 75 and it included a mix of people, from wives of Fort Lewis soldiers to adult State workers from downtown to transfers from community colleges and brand-new Evergreen students. This was their second year. I've got to say that was a fantastic team. I'd never taught with

either of them before. I didn't even know Bret. But it was a fantastic team, and we energized each other.

I will say I learned a lot of things from Bret because he really applied mathematics to ecology, which I could identify with, and I did also. But he explained some things that in ecology are always explained with theoretical models and connected them up with real situations in nature for the first time. I'd never seen that done before.

One of the deans was going to sit in on our class and he was going to present that. The dean was evaluating Bret, and I thought, oh, no. This was going to be difficult. But he pulled it off majestically and the dean understood it.

Fiksdal: Oh, the dean was not a scientist, and you were worried about that?

Milne: That's right. The dean did not have a science focus.

Fiksdal: I was a dean. It was amazing how many things I could understand in the classes, because that's what you're trying to do is teach people who don't get it.

Milne: Absolutely. Teach people who you know where they're coming from and what you can't say and how you should phrase it.

This was a time when George Bush had done something that antagonized the whole world. The students wanted to have a campus-wide shutdown and go up and picket Fort Lewis. Our class asked me and Bret and Tom to cancel class and join them. We said we'd tell them the next day.

We talked about it, and we figured out a plan that, oh my gosh, it was just perfect Evergreen. We came back and we said, "Well, from our political perspective, we would love to do that and go up and join you, so we're going to make it possible for anybody that wants to skip class that day just to go.

"However, we work for all of the citizens of the entire state and those include maybe even half of the population that doesn't agree that this was something that ought to be protested. We've got to have the class. For the people who are reluctant to join it, or have whatever reason to not join it, we will continue the class. And then, "A few days later, we'll have an exercise where the people who missed it can get the subject matter. And then, we will have a class-wide discussion of what came from this activity. Do you feel like you made a difference? Do you feel like you changed anybody's mind? Anybody can say anything they like on either side of the topic."

And we did, and it was just fantastically successful. The class came back together again and went right on. I've got to say that Bret was very instrumental in helping us put that together. I just wish later, when there was the big controversy about the Day of Absence that something like that, I think, could have pulled it back together.

Fiksdal: I wasn't there then so I didn't quite understand everything that happened, but I was very disappointed, too. I was disappointed that the faculty didn't listen more carefully to what Bret had to say.

Milne: So was I. I was stunned by that.

Fiksdal: I couldn't quite understand that.

Milne: Anyway, that was my last class.

Fiksdal: Do you remember what year that was, your last class?

Milne: It was winter quarter 2005.

Fiksdal: Were you on a post-retirement [contract]?

Milne: I was.

Fiksdal: So, you had retired earlier.

Milne: I retired at the end of the academic year 2002-2003.

Fiksdal: Then you taught several times?

Milne: Right. One, it was a class that I really loved. Two, I didn't have to have any committee assignments. [laughter]

Fiksdal: True.

Milne: The very last one was this one with Tom and Bret. Oh, my gosh, did we get along. We were really meant to teach together.

Fiksdal: That is so nice. That answers one question of good teams. Previously, I think you told me you taught a lot with other people—Erik Thuesen and . . .

Milne: Gerardo Chin-Leo. I would teach with them anytime. They were great colleagues. I was never on a team in which the people were at odds with each other.

Fiksdal: That's really lucky.

Milne: I was on a team with Bill Brown and Al Wiedemann. We had been put there. [laughing] It had something to do with environmental science. Al was a botanist, Bill was the geographer, and I was whatever I was [marine biology].

I remember when Bill and I sat down with Al, Al was in a very bad mood for some reason. It was not us, it was how things were going. He said, "We're not going to have any fieldtrips." Bill and I looked at each other and said, "Fieldtrips, introduction to natural science, that's going to put in a dent in our offering." Then he said, "And we're not going to have any lectures." "Well, what do you envision?" "We're not going to have any seminars." [laughing] What is left?

Fiksdal: I don't know. You're lab rats or something?

Milne: Watch movies? I don't know. Bill and I at that time were really on the same team and meeting privately saying, "Let's work on this." We managed to get him to come around. "Al, you know a heck of a lot about plants, and we don't know that."

Fiksdal: When I think of Al Wiedemann, I think of field projects. Something must have happened.

Milne: We finally, after about two weeks, worked our way back to lectures, fieldtrips, labs, seminars.

Fiksdal: And everything worked out between the three of you?

Milne: Everything worked out. I mention that because later on, poor Bill was in trouble. Maybe I mentioned this. He was put in a class with me and Pete Taylor.

Fiksdal: I think you mentioned it when the recording had stopped, but I'm not sure. The recording is going. Would you like to talk about that a little bit?

Milne: You kind of know that story. Do you think it's something we ought to spend time on?

Fiksdal: Well, I do. There's a lot of stories that we keep to ourselves about difficulties with colleagues, and I think it could be useful to understand some ways it was approached in the past.

Milne: Sure. I never taught with Bill again after the team with Al. He'd taught with many other people. His office was just down the hall from mine, and we got along famously. I loved his sense of humor. He once related a story about the Tennessee police that were surrounding this house and a guy was in there with a gun. They tried calling the phone number and the guy answered and said, "I can't talk now. I'm busy!" [laughter]

The deans decided that teaming him up with me and Pete would put him in a supportive environment, but he had to come through with his responsibilities or they said they would let him go.

Here we were. I mentioned that we had planned this class for 50 students, two faculty. Made arrangements for going up to the Friday Harbor Labs, field trips and labs and things like that. They assigned Bill to us, so with Bill came another 30 students. Oh, my gosh, we had to really rework our lab schedules. We could not all go up to Friday Harbor with a crowd that size, so we had to divide up the field trip.

We met with Bill, and we said, "We understand that the deans are on your case. We're going to make this work." We addressed the fact that with three faculty, this means three times as much work, or one and a half, or whatever the number is, so we're going to rig it to turn that into our advantage. Each of us will do the same thing for three weeks, and the students will rotate through all of us, so they'll get all of the content. Each of us will have just one week's worth of work to prepare for, and it will be in our own disciplines.

We came together with a plan to do that, and he immediately departed from it by bringing in guest lecturers who didn't realize they were going to have to come back two more weeks.

Fiksdal: That's a lot to ask a guest lecturer.

Milne: Yeah, and it crashed. We said, "Okay, we now know what went wrong, so we're going to repeat that pattern." And he always agreed. He said, "Okay, let's do it this way."

I later learned that that had been his problem earlier. He had just lost his confidence that he had something meaningful to say in classes—and I know he did, I know he did—and the program crashed. There isn't a lot more to say.

Fiksdal: After one quarter?

Milne: Yes, one quarter.

Fiksdal: Oh, that's really too bad, and it's a lot of work doing all that planning to accommodate another person.

Milne: We wanted it to work. We really talked about that and said, "We're going to make this work." I didn't realize that in the larger faculty, they, too, had had a problem with him abandoning their plan.

Oh, my gosh, these hearings started, and students were protesting. The hearing examiner said, "I'm not going to consider anything that preceded this year. It all depends on this year."

Fiksdal: Oh, for heaven's sakes. That put a lot of pressure on you, then.

Milne: Oh, yeah. In fact, Pete—congenial guy that he is—it's hard to describe what his evaluation—it was not an aggressive evaluation, nor was it supportive, and mine told it like it was. I included in there that for all that, I found him a very congenial colleague. I enjoyed working with him and was frustrated by what was happening, and pointed out—as we were supposed to do in these evaluations—"You didn't realize that the speaker was going to have to come back three times, and that wasn't workable."

And I said, "You have plenty to say yourself in this arena," and named some topics and said, "You just need to trust yourself that the students will listen and learn." And they would. They liked him. He was a congenial guy. I became the reason why he was being fired.

Fiksdal: You regret that, I imagine.

Milne: No. There were enough other people involved to take half the heat.

Fiksdal: Okay, so in the end, it wasn't just your statement that—

Milne: He'd worked with Richard Cellarius the quarter before and Richard was very timid about saying that anything had gone wrong, but it had. After our quarter, I forget what happened.

Fiksdal: Right, because he kept teaching, so it was all about that year.

Milne: Mm-hm. But I know Lucretia, boy, she was just scathing.

Fiksdal: Lucretia . . . ?

Milne: Lucretia Harrison. Was that her name?

Fiksdal: Lucia Harrison.

Milne: I happened to see that evaluation and I thought, oh, that's . . . Anyway, that was a bad experience.

Fiksdal: Yeah, it was a tough experience. He was an African American on top of being a geographer.

Milne: He never said I was a racist.

Fiksdal: That's good.

Milne: I appreciated that.

Fiksdal: Let's think back. You mentioned you were on the hiring committee several times. Did you have other governance positions that you remember?

Milne: That's the one that I really remember. I was on it a bunch of times. I did, within the Environmental Studies Group, one time they asked me to figure out where our students are coming from and where they go after they leave our classes. And I did. I didn't know how to start it, but I finally got in contact with Steve Hunter, and he was delighted to take that on.

He pulled together this amazing survey of where our incoming class had been the quarter before, the year before, and then for our class that had already left, where they'd gone from there. That was a bunch of work. I liked doing it.

What else was there? There were a couple, but I don't really remember what they were.

Fiksdal: Those are consequential things that you're talking about and that's good. That's fine.

Milne: I scrupulously avoided being a dean.

Fiksdal: I so note. [laughter] Just tell me why you avoided that.

Milne: Because the deans didn't get to teach. That was one. The other that I heard from rumblings was how much they were immersed in personnel matters.

Fiksdal: Unfortunately. You mentioned Bill Brown, but there were many. Then there were perennials, people just popped up. You'd talk to another dean at another time, and they'd said, "Yep, number one priority." Just wasted a lot of time.

But that wasn't all you did as a dean. I think there were a lot of good things. But I did stop. I had a six-year appointment and I worked for five. I just couldn't take it anymore. I needed to get back into the classroom. I understand that.

Milne: The main thing was they don't get to teach.

Fiksdal: No, and you start to lose touch with teaching, with students. Your schedule is an ongoing 8:00 to 5:00 schedule. That gets annoying as well.

Milne: I taught one summer school year. That was '73-'74. In fact, we were out at the coast when Richard Nixon resigned almost as soon as we got out there, and we heard nothing about it. When we drove back here, somebody rushed out and shouted, "Nixon has resigned!" If I had not heard that, enough time had gone by that the newspapers were now talking about President Ford—

Fiksdal: Who is this President Ford? What's happened? [laughter] That's funny. Back then, that's true. There were daily newspapers and the daily news and that's it. That's funny.

Milne: I never taught summer school again because I needed the break. The academic year was always so intense that to continue all that, and then have two weeks to yourself and start it all up again, I could not do that.

Fiksdal: I can understand. In your time teaching, thinking back, do you remember some teaching—you mentioned Bret Weinstein and I think that would fit into this category of people who influenced you in a certain way by their philosophy or their approach to teaching, or even teaching strategies that maybe you appreciated and maybe adopted? Do you remember?

Milne: Yes, I do. That would be Carolyn Dobbs. When I came to the college, I had been through sciences, mostly sciences, and I was developing this view that all you needed to do was use science to figure out the answer and it's problem solved.

Very early on, I remember having a discussion with Carolyn and she said, "You've got to realize that the scientific answer is only part of the solution. Suppose you apply that, and a hundred people lose their jobs? Or it costs \$50 million. The economic dimension, the social dimension, what it means to people's lives, how it might change the landscape. Yes, it might solve the problem that you were looking intensely at, but there are all sorts of other ramifications."

That was early, and that was how I think I really began to develop my view that we ought to be reading these books that are not about science. We ought to be keeping our eyes on the whole civilization's social dimension for what it is we're proposing to do.

I remember, even as early as maybe the second or third year, reading a book called *City Politics* as one of our seminar books. I would never have picked that one up and started reading it and I learned a heck of a lot from it. I forget who proposed it. So, early on, Carolyn Dobbs expanded my whole worldview.

Fiksdal: That's terrific.

Milne: Other methods of teaching . . . no, I would say she had the most profound effect on me of any faculty member.

Fiksdal: I'd say that's a pretty profound thing that she was able to do—to get you to move those blinders away.

Milne: Oh, yeah.

Fiksdal: Because I think in our disciplines, we have blinders. You've got to just look at this amount of data and get this written up and published, and that's the job.

Milne: Right. Or why are you thinking about unemployment when the problem is pollution?

Fiksdal: Exactly. I had a question in my mind, and I think I've got it formulated. You told me about your academic career, and your PhD was not in marine biology.

Milne: No, it was not.

Fiksdal: But it seems like your examples and your teaching seem to be all about marine biology. I know you loved that, and you did that work at the UW. But I'm trying to understand now, was that mainly your career? Marine biology?

Milne: Yes, that's what it became.

Fiksdal: If so, why is that?

Milne: I had gone from a physics major—which I thought, boy, that really explains everything; there's nothing else you need to know—but I was interested in doing something that had an element of adventure.

In high school, I was incredibly interested in biology, always was and still am. But when I went to college, I thought, this has been a nice interest, but you can't make a living at it. Imagine somebody saying that. Well, that was me.

Fiksdal: You sound like one of our current students. [laughter] But you were being practical. I think that's fine.

Milne: I thought I was. I thought, I need to major in something that I can find a job doing, and physics seemed like the right thing. I can't tell you how much that made me at home in the world, understanding space, radiation, electricity, heat, energy, momentum, planets, stars. Things like that. It just made me a citizen of the universe.

But I was also thinking I would like to do something that gets me outdoors. I went to the University of Washington and was in the Oceanography Department master's program for three years. I had a classic German professor of the old observational school. I liked him and got along well with him. He liked me. But I was interested in—well, I'll tell you what I was interested in. There is this problem in

oceanography that lots and lots of organisms live 500 meters below the surface during the day, and at night, they all come up to the surface. They stay there till it starts getting light and then they all go back down. The question has always been, why don't they just stay at the surface? Then there are these theories—they're hiding from predators or whatever.

It was always phrased, why do they waste all that energy swimming up and down? I thought, what if they're saving energy? I was interested in that problem, and as it turns out, they are. I was probably the first person to want to think that. But my major professor had no interest in me following that up. There were some faculty who did. I learned later that somebody at Halifax had really discovered that this is true.

Fiksdal: Oh, no! Your idea was—

Milne: No, they had never heard of me. The animals live in cold water when they're deep, and their metabolism is very, very slow. Their metabolism speeds up tremendously when they get to the surface, and they need more food. The small amount of mechanical energy that they use going up and down is negligible.

Fiksdal: Would we be able to apply this theory to the geoduck?

Milne: No.

Fiksdal: Oh, darn.

Milne: The geoduck just sits there. [laughing] I left there without actually completing the master's degree, but I got all of the education. Down at Oregon State, I had some contact with the marine biologist down there, but I was really able to come back to it when I came to Evergreen.

Fiksdal: You got to pursue your passion.

Milne: Right.

Fiksdal: That's very exciting because some people moved completely out of their discipline. You stayed within one of your disciplines. That's terrific.

Milne: Where were we going with this?

Fiksdal: I just was wondering about why you mostly taught marine biology classes.

Milne: Oh, I loved it. I loved getting outside. I liked the ocean. Loved the estuaries.

Fiksdal: I was struck by the fact that it sounds like you had seminars in all your programs.

Milne: In all my programs?

Fiksdal: In a lot of your programs, you brought up seminars.

Milne: I think in every one. I think there was always a seminar.

Fiksdal: That's a very exciting fact that I wanted to underscore and ask you a little about because for a long time at Evergreen—let's say my knowledge of the discussion starts in the '90s, certainly when I was a dean in the late '90s—a lot of the science faculty were not having seminars. One of the questions was, how can we get them to do that? They're working long hours in the lab, and it takes a lot of effort to do labs, so there were all kinds of reasons, I guess. But why do you think you always had seminars in your programs?

Milne: Hmm. That's a good question.

Fiksdal: I'm not saying you were alone because clearly, you taught with a lot of other people.

Milne: Oh, yeah. Erik and Gerardo. With them, our seminars were on scientific articles but they always bore on what we were doing in one way or another. For example, when Pete and I were teaching Marine Biology, we had a seminar on the book *The Hunt for Red October*.

Fiksdal: Oh, for heaven's sakes. That's a good book.

Milne: Yes, it is. There is so much stuff about underwater sound and pressure and stuff like that in there. Besides, it's an engaging story. That was an example. It wasn't utterly unrelated to what we were doing.

In teaching with teams like Carolyn and Kaye V. Ladd, they had really different perspectives. Among the three of us, we could always identify a book that would fit what we were doing and have a seminar on it.

I'll say, I think we always had seminars. There might have been a class or two where we didn't, but generally, I tried to, and so did the faculty I taught with.

Fiksdal: How did you feel about being a seminar leader or facilitator? Was that easy or hard for you?

Milne: It was easy from the beginning. I would read the book. I know there were faculty that said you didn't need to.

Fiksdal: Really? [laughter] No, I think you need to read the book.

Milne: I can think of one. [laughing] Nobody I ever taught with. In 1975, I was the Thurston County coordinator of a group that wanted to ban nuclear energy. I was kind of active and prominent in it. It had nothing to do with what I was doing at the college.

I remember somebody that I still know and really love, a guy named Tom Sherwold—ever heard of him?

Fiksdal: I haven't.

Milne: He happened to be in my class, and I can't remember what the class was, but we were having seminars. One of them was some book about energy. He brought it up in class. "Well, maybe nuclear energy is the answer." And he knew . . .

Fiksdal: The devil's advocate.

Milne: . . . that I didn't believe that. I remember saying, "Well, maybe. Why don't we just share what we know about it?" I did not try to impose my view on the class. I usually told them, or they already knew. In fact, I always told them, "You do not have to agree with me. You just learn the facts, interpret them as you will, present them honestly and arrive at your own opinion."

I was in many classes where their opinion was not mine at the end. That was fine. That was perfectly okay. It was what we were there for. I remember that first instant that I thought I didn't even have to think about it. I just knew. "Well, let's discuss it."

Fiksdal: That's great.

Milne: I do know there was a faculty member who would put negative remarks in his evaluations about students who didn't agree with him.

Fiksdal: Oh, no.

Milne: Yeah.

Fiksdal: That's not good. We're going to pause for a second.

[End Part 1 of 2 of David Milne on March 16, 2023]

[Begin Part 2 of 2 of David Milne on March 16, 2023]

Fiksdal: We're starting a new segment.

Milne: Okay. The work was getting so hard, and I'd been at it so long, that I was looking for a way to leave Evergreen and start another job.

Fiksdal: Another teaching job?

Milne: Not a teaching job. The Nature Conservancy was looking for somebody to work over on the coast. I interviewed for that one. I interviewed at a museum in Portland. I got this opportunity to go work for NASA on the search for extraterrestrial intelligence, if you can believe that.

Fiksdal: No, I can't.

Milne: It was a radio telescope survey. They were learning plenty, but while they were learning it, they were looking for the kind of signal that only a transmitter can create.

Fiksdal: This called on your physics background?

Milne: Some. My education background, especially. I had been down at the NASA Ames Research Center in California a couple summers on fellowships. Then, for a year, as an editor of a compilation they were putting together on this topic.

Fiksdal: Oh, so you were familiar.

Milne: That's another subject. I got this invitation to go down there for a couple of years and run a science education program. It was being created from the ground up. It was for middle school students from third grade to eighth grade.

Fiksdal: A completely different population.

Milne: Yes. Those are the best three years of my life. [laughing] There was a team of 20 ace teachers from around the Bay Area that were being paid to come in maybe twice a month and spend a day at this institute where we would talk about what we were doing, how our teaching is going, ideas for new lessons and things like that. Then there was a staff of lesson writers that was there. We were in a room with the institute's public relations scientist, who was probably the best guy I ever worked with. It was fantastic.

The director of this whole thing didn't know me at all. He just knew me by reputation from when I'd been there other times. He was really kind of wondering how this was all going to work out. I remember, in the first week, I went down there—I left here and was down there for three years and my dear wife was here. It was kind of a commuter marriage.

Fiksdal: Oh, dear.

Milne: But it worked. We made it work.

Fiksdal: She chose not to go with you.

Milne: She would rather be here. Her family is here. I was also writing a book—a different book—and I wanted to be monastic. There were a number of reasons why she wanted to stay here. Her friends, her artist friends. She was helping run a store with a friend. All that.

When I went there, I was kind of discouraged. I thought, oh, you know what? Evergreen has left me with no marketable skills at all. [chuckles] The first week, I called together all of these teachers and they had not met each other. This was going to be their first meeting. There were about a dozen of them, I think, who ought to be at this meeting. There were some others on the outside.

The guy that I was working for, Director of the SETI Institute, came in and we all said, "Hello, I'm So-and-So," and we wore nametags and so on. I knew something about them. We all sat down around this big table, and I said, "I'd like to have everybody go around the table, please, and introduce yourself and say what school you're from, and what grade you're teaching, and just the name of a lesson that you like teaching best." They all did that, and that started conversations. I said, "Hang on. Let's wait till we've all had a chance to talk."

I had an agenda. "If you guys think this is a good idea, I'd like to have some people here once in a while during the week, and bring your ideas for a lesson that you'd like to work on and take the time to work on it." Everybody was talking and I said, "You're next. Give Gerardo over here a chance to finish."

After that, I had them bring their favorite lesson and set it up before we had this meeting and stand by while people went by. Introduce your lesson, and the next person do that. Then everybody

went home, energized, full of ideas. The guy I was working for said, "I've never seen a meeting handled like that." [laughing]

Fiksdal: Suddenly, you realized you had skills after all. [laughter]

Milne: Oh, my gosh. Things just got better from then on. It was really, really energizing. I would go out and visit the classrooms where these guys were testing our lessons and sit there. I became a personality to all these classes. "Doctor Orbit." [laughter]

Fiksdal: Did you choose that name?

Milne: I chose it in conjunction with the public science guy and the gal who was essentially the head of the team of writers. I wish I could find a picture. Give me a minute and I'll see if I can find that picture. I want to show you the character of this whole thing.

Fiksdal: Okay. We'll pause this for a second.

Milne: It's a picture on video that we took on a film for third graders. NASA was asking the third graders to help figure out where their stolen space shuttle had gone. It had been stolen by a lady astronaut named Amelia Spaceheart. [laughter]

Fiksdal: Well, she had a heart. That's good.

Milne: The public science guy was an administrator who was in serious trouble for letting her take off in the space shuttle. She was interested in following up some signal from somewhere in the solar system.

And I was Doctor Orbit. I was the guy that was operating a computer that was trying to track her. This was a series of videos in which we all acted out these roles. These pictures came up on the computer. "All right! All right! We've got this picture! Where is it, kids? Where is it?" They might see Saturn in the picture or something like that. They loved it. All three of us were just personalities.

Fiksdal: Yes, you were in the video, and then you would come to their class! Oh, I can't imagine. They must have been thrilled.

Milne: It was really funny. I think the best evaluation I got over that whole three years was "This class liked Dr. Orbit because he thinks like a kid."

Fiksdal: Oh, isn't that the best?

Milne: Yeah, it was heartwarming. That was so much fun.

Fiksdal: It is heartwarming. You got a leave of absence from Evergreen to do that?

Milne: Two years. I didn't dare ask for another. I couldn't come back, and I wanted to come back here. But when I left, they wanted me to stay and work there. This was funded by the National Science Foundation, and I was in charge of the grant. I was answerable to one of the scientists, but she was doing research, and then there was the Director of the Institute, where the facility actually was. They wanted me to stay, and I wanted to come back here.

Fiksdal: Yeah. That sounds like a great interlude. I think for most of the faculty who have been there a long time, you need something. People rotate into the library or into advising. I became a dean, and you went off to look for extraterrestrials.

Now what we're going to do is talk a little bit about some writing that you've done. First, you were talking about when you went to work with the SETI Institute, but you were interested also in writing a book.

Milne: Yes. When I went down there, I had been writing this book, which eventually came out, *Marine Life and the Sea*, a real marine biology textbook. I'd been working on that and was not finding enough spare time while I was working at Evergreen to make a lot of progress on it.

I went down there, and I had a 40-hour work week—this was maybe the first time in my life—and it was while working there, it was the kind of thing, if you didn't get it finished, you just came back to it the next day.

Fiksdal: Wow! A dream job.

Milne: Yeah! You had weekends and evenings free. Being there enabled me to get this written. I would go home at night—Dee was here [in Olympia]—and do nothing but write on this thing. Write on it all weekend long. Get out just enough. Go see the coast in California because that's new to me. That was an amazingly good experience.

The manuscript was published by Wadsworth Publishing Company. I wrote three drafts of it, which were sent out to 52 reviewers. I was not supposed to know who they were, but it was quickly obvious from their writing styles and their stationery and stuff like that who it was, so I got to know them.

In fact, at Evergreen, some others and I had this Friday lunch. Everybody brings a sack lunch and somebody from the faculty talks about something they've been doing. That was really good.

Burt Guttman and I put on one in which we talked about what it's like to write a book and publish it. All of the reviewers, and the time, and you've got to decide for each reviewer, is this a good criticism or is it not?

I think the main thing that I remember that I learned from all this was that if I had a beer and worked on the manuscript and thought it was great, the next morning I end up crossing it all out. [laughing] I had no feeling the night before that this was affecting my writing, but it was so obvious the next day.

That came out in 1995 and it was extremely popular, and it sold out quickly. There were some reasons why there was never a second edition. It's okay.

The other book—this one here—the title is *Bashing the Great Green Invaders*, and I think maybe rednecks or even environmentalists have taken that to mean fighting environmentalists. That's not what it's about. It was about the invasion of Washington's coast by a non-native grass from the East Coast. Those are the green invaders.

This is a huge, huge environmental success story—it [the grass] was wiped out after 15 years—and it was a source of a fantastic class that I had based on the ecology and the human impact,

economics of this invasive species on the communities of the coast. We went over there all the time, and students took part in this. They had a lot of papers and even a thesis or two based on this grass.

Fiksdal: How many years did you work on that project in your programs?

Milne: The first program was a one-quarter group contract in 1994, I believe—I think maybe it started January 1994—and I had that class for the next 10 years. It was incredibly popular.

A couple of the students that took it actually went on to become the statewide [Washington State] Spartina coordinators for the whole program. They were, I don't want to say, trained, but they learned enough. They had jurisdiction over like five departments in the Washington State government.

Fiksdal: But obviously, people took this very seriously, this grass.

Milne: Oh, they did.

Fiksdal: Could you explain to a non-scientist why it was so important?

Milne: Sure. It was invading Willapa Bay, which is this huge bay on our coast—a very shallow bay—and aquaculture there supports the whole county. It also provides something like 20 percent of the entire oyster supply in the entire United States. This grass was going to end it all.

Also, like Bowerman Basin over there, Willapa Bay is a migrating stop for ducks and shorebirds, and the grass was going to destroy the entire habitat. Everybody took it seriously from day one when they saw it start to spread how deadly this was going to be.

So, DNR, Fish & Wildlife, county weed boards, tribes, the Department of Agriculture, private homeowners, volunteers, high school classes—everybody joined forces against it. Talking to all those people was part of our class and going over there to help eradicate it and see how difficult that was, that was the whole basis of a class.

The thing that made our students, I think, so attractive to the State government was we went over and talked to people and learned what their concerns were, and developed the skill of how do you start a conversation with somebody you might not agree with? Say, for example, an oyster farmer whose attitude toward regulations is “To hell with them?” And he does it anyway, and then what? How do you talk to someone like that?

Fiksdal: Did the students learn how to do this by recording people?

Milne: No. Just stand there with your hands in your pockets and boots and talk.

Fiksdal: And bring that back.

Milne: Right. Anyway, I wrote this thanks to Covid. I was here at Panorama. I wasn't going anywhere. And it was fun. When I started to write it, it just wrote itself.

Fiksdal: Did you publish it yourself?

Milne: Self-published through Amazon.

Fiksdal: Terrific, so it's still available there?

Milne: Yes, it is. Twenty dollars. I'll tell you also, I very much underpriced it because I wanted bookstores to be able to buy it and sell it. I didn't anticipate how hostile bookstores are toward Amazon, so I don't think many of them are doing it. Some are, I know.

Fiksdal: Yeah, you have to choose your place of publishing, because each place has its own methods for getting books out—or not, burying them. Those are two really good examples. It sounds like you have done a lot of writing in your life.

Milne: Yes, I have written letters to the editor to *The Olympian* for decades.

Fiksdal: I remember reading a lot of them.

Milne: Oh, yeah. I'd like to show you one. I worked with an outfit that was trying to save Capitol Lake for 10 years, starting about 2012—I was retired then—and I ended up being the antagonist for the Department of Ecology.

They—I will say it out loud—were part of a conspiracy to get rid of the lake and replace it with an estuary, not for scientific reasons but for political reasons. My colleagues and I were hitting brick walls wherever we went. That was a case where science didn't make any difference.

First of all, I drew on my experience in Budd Inlet with classes. We'd done measurements there. Switched over to fresh water and actually got out on Capitol Lake after it was closed and made some measurements. I wrote a number of reports defending Capitol Lake. One was for the Audubon Society. It's called "Capitol Lake: Washington's Environmental Gem," which it really, really is. And I took on the Department of Ecology. They were using a computer model that supposedly showed that Budd Inlet was being damaged by Capitol Lake. It was not.

They had been getting away with it because hardly anybody is in a position to challenge computer modeling, but I was. I understood it. I used to do it, actually. Boy oh boy. Did I get stonewalled. [laughing] I would write these reports and give them to the Department of Ecology and usually, there was no reply, and they were never cited in the literature cited in all of their computer modeling reports. That was, again, some more writing that I did.

Fiksdal: Can I follow up? There has been an environmental impact study. The decision by the State is that it will disappear, the Capitol Lake, and become an estuary, so there was time to resubmit.

Milne: I did. I participated in that process, I commented on that thing, and they kept saying the same things. They wished I'd go away. They really did. [laughing]

Fiksdal: That's useful to know.

Milne: Those reports are available on the CLIPA Web site. It's Capitol Lake Improvement and Protection Association. Bunch of businessmen, realtors, downtown marina owners and operators, so I was immersed in that unlikely company for years and learned plenty about it.

I will say that that group of people called me "Dr. Milne" more in one meeting than anybody ever said in 35 years at Evergreen. [laughing]

Fiksdal: I have to laugh because it's true. We never asked the students to call us "doctor." We were known by our first names. It has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?

Milne: Some of these guys I was working with were a little reluctant to use my first name. All the same age.

Fiksdal: It's a mark of respect and I think that's good.

Milne: It helped in dealing with the Department of Ecology. This was not just somebody randomly selected.

Fiksdal: No, and you had evidence that you were presenting.

Milne: So, there is that writing and there are those reports.

Fiksdal: That's great.

Milne: They're quite impressive. I used their own figures—reproduced those, critiqued them. Other professionals who were writing that stuff, I don't know how they could live with themselves, the things they were saying.

Fiksdal: We're picking up on another theme in your interview, which is science matters.

Milne: Yes.

Fiksdal: It's difficult not to be heard. Since we've gotten into your post-retirement years, I see a piano, and you have talked a little bit about your performances, and I want to know, when did you start your lessons? It must have been in your youth. Who knows? Why don't you tell me a little bit about your piano playing?

[Response is shortened version written by Dave]

Milne: I took piano lessons from Mrs. Anchor who lived down the street. I was about 10 years old. When our family moved out of Ferndale to Rochester, a small town to the north, my lessons ended and I pretty much stopped playing the piano. My interest revived when I went to college in 1957. My roommate and I purchased an old piano for \$50 from a Vermont farmer who had dozens of them in his barn, and somehow got it up the stairs to the second floor of our dorm and put it in our room. Here I played it for raucous sing-alongs until we moved it a second time over to a fraternity house, where I lived during my senior year. The guys insisted on raucous sing-alongs every Saturday night, and that is where I really learned to play. Nobody in that energetic crowd was paying much attention to whether or not I was making mistakes, and it was the start of a lifelong experience in which I enjoyed playing for people who were focused on something else.

After a lapse of many years, I resumed piano playing again after I came to Evergreen. I started by buying a piano from Bud Johansen, about 1972 or so. Since then I've had a special fascination with ragtime – starting with Scott Joplin's Maple Leaf Rag – and have played more or less regularly, until Dee's health went into decline in 2015.

One highlight of those musical years included learning to play accompaniments to silent comedy movies. The first of those was Buster Keaton's fantastic locomotive film, *The General*. These were perfect opportunities to play for audiences that were not really listening to me – they were focused on the films – and I presented many of them. Always in support of good causes – the Camp Quixote residents, restorations of old theaters, charitable projects by the Elks organization and the like. Always

for donations, always free of charge for people with stressed budgets and/or kids, never for pay. And now, on occasion, for the retired residents of Panorama.

Now that I've retired and am myself living at Panorama, I've resumed playing ragtime and am really enjoying that. This is in no small part due to encouragement by Judy Lindlauf, a retired Evergreen administrator who has become a very good jazz pianist.

Fiksdal: One of the questions that we ask towards the end that you can answer or not is, do you have any thoughts about—we know Evergreen's enrollment is quite low and they're struggling. They're doing all kinds of things to try to change that and revive the college, but they have fired a lot of faculty. The firing has stopped, luckily. Still, they're not in such a good place. You earlier mentioned threats to the college, and those occurred quite often. Now, there's another big threat. Well, I don't know how big a threat it is. It is a state college.

Do you have any thoughts about what the college should be doing or could be doing, or any observations about all of that?

Milne: I think I'm too far away from it to say anything meaningful about that.

Fiksdal: Would you be sad if the college did close its doors or change its approach.

Milne: Absolutely.

Fiksdal: We all worked really hard to make that college viable.

Milne: We worked to make it alternative.

Fiksdal: We did.

Milne: And I think if it's not alternative, then maybe it's superfluous. I just think of the story that I told you when you came in by a student who said, first of all, she left home early to work on this, and she said that she could never have done that in a conventional college. She might have come around to it later, but maybe not. But she really was armed to go forth and do that by what she was able to do at Evergreen.

Alternative. Stay interdisciplinary. What else? Steady as she goes, I guess I would say. I hope it's still what it once was.

Fiksdal: Thank you, Dave. This has been a pleasure to talk to you.

Milne: You're welcome.

Fiksdal: I learned a lot about you and about your many interests, so thank you so much for contributing to our [oral histories]. Okay, we're going to stop.

Milne: Thank you for interviewing me.

[Next segment was written by Dave to add to his memories of Evergreen's early days]

I'd like to conclude with just one last memory of the "early days" that we didn't talk about. That is, a hilarious incident that occurred during one of TESC's "Super Saturdays," which were one-day fairs held yearly on campus late in the spring. The whole Olympia community was invited. Visitors from off

campus turned out in droves. This personal experience really illustrates the fun and camaraderie of those first years.

Among many other attractions of those events – bands, craft booths, dunk tanks, etc – there was a tent where Evergreen employees could put on costumes, then go out and mingle with the crowds of people enjoying the fair. These included Darth Vader and Wookie characters from the Star Wars movies. The Wookie was easier ... you didn't have to speak English with the many kids surrounding you ... just say AWWRRRRR and gesture.

The big hairy costume was infernally hot. While walking around among kids and parents (acting like a Wookie visiting planet Earth, of course) I made my way to the refreshment area, at that time on the fourth floor of the library. That very large space contained a kitchen and dining area filled with tables and chairs, at that time. It was packed with people beating the heat. And of course, they all noticed that a Wookie had just walked in.

At the counter, I realized that I couldn't drink my Coke without removing my "head." That would tip off the kids that the Wookie wasn't real! So, I stepped through a swinging door leading to an obscure seldom-used stairway to the ground floor, removed my "head," drank the Coke, replaced the head and was just reaching for the door to go back into the refreshment area when ...

... the door swung open, toward me! Holding it open was a guy who was looking back into the room, talking to someone. He didn't see me, but everyone else in the room did. He kept saying things like "That's right! Parking Lot B! What? No! At 3:30! Right! Bring the kids ... "

Everyone in the room was spellbound. Here was this guy with a gigantic Wookie towering over him, standing there right behind him, and he didn't know it.

He turned. And screamed! The crowd roared with laughter and applauded. The Wookie went back to work, waving, shaking hands with kids, and out the hallway door to the elevator.

Forever after, when people ask, "What is the funniest thing that ever happened to you," I recall that incident."

[End Part 2 of 2 of David Milne on March 16, 2023]