Lin Nelson

Interviewed by Anthony Zaragoza

The Evergreen State College oral history project

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FINAL

Begin Part 1 of 3 of Lin Nelson on 9-6-2019

Zaragoza: Would you just start by telling us your name?

Nelson: Lin Nelson.

Zaragoza: Where did you grow up?

Nelson: I grew up in New England in Windsor, Connecticut.

Zaragoza: What was that like when you were growing up?

Nelson: I always feel, particularly here on the West Coast, that I have to explain, defend, attack and then re-defend Connecticut as a state. It's probably one of the most tedious, boring, somewhat predictable, insurance-saturated states in the county. So when I say I'm from Connecticut, I always wince a little.

But let me tell you. Where I grew up, a little town north of Hartford, my family was there quite a while, although some parts of the family recently immigrated from England and Denmark. Windsor is a little town north of Hartford, one of these little old New England towns, somewhat rooted in all things religious and entrepreneurial. If somebody asked me, what's the most significant thing about my childhood experience, the one thing I continually go to—and I think now that I'm older, I pay more and more attention to—is that Windsor is an old New England town that also happens to be a tobacco production area. You wouldn't think about that in New England. You usually think the Carolinas, where that's still true.

But I grew up not far from the tobacco fields. You might say, "Why the hell are they growing tobacco in Connecticut?" There were some entrepreneurs—it goes way back to the mid-19th century—who found that the particular ecology and sort of land of the region, was appropriate for shade tobacco, which is the outer leaf for cigars. Anyway, it's a huge production activity in my community that I learned about as a kid. The cool thing, and the reason this is significant, is because it opened my eyes to a whole different world. The cool thing was at age 12, I could start working there.

My family had very little experience with college. In fact, no one in my family had ever gone to college. My mother went through school to ninth grade, worked in factories after that. My dad went to a technical school to become a bookkeeper. No one anywhere in all reaches of the family had ever gone to college, or even thought about it. So I was in junior high and high school, and we started thinking, oh, I should go to college. My parents said to me, "If you're going to go to college, you've got to go work on the farm."

The farms in Windsor are pretty well known as a place where local low-income, lower middle class kids can work. I worked there five summers while going to school. I mention this because it was a very formative experience. It was a formative experience of my health, which is another story, which I only fully realized a couple decades after I left the fields. But it was an eye-opening experience. For a 12-year-old to get on a bus at 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning to go out to the sheds, where it was race- and sex-segregated, was a tremendously shocking, but fascinating, experience for me.

The girls worked in the sheds, where you sort and put leaves on a lathe. . The boys work in the fields. The immigrant labor (which in our little town, which was mostly Anglo-New-Englandy kind of place) --- there were work camps on the outskirts of town that I only learned about by working in tobacco. Those workers were from the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and Florida, some from the Carolinas. They would come up seasonally and live in these camps that were surrounded by barbed wire.

Zaragoza: Is this mid-'60s?

Nelson: Yes. I was born in '48, I started there in '60. I worked there five summers, up through '65. It was fascinating to me. As a kid, everything's new and exciting, and there was also a kind of high school teen party feature to it. There were a couple boys in the shed who were allowed the jobs to go up into the rafters to hang the tobacco. The girls worked at the machinery. There were people in and out. There was strange activity at times, and there were initiation rites for teenagers. So you would go out to use the outhouse—you'd always be warned about this, and it did happen—they decided they would go after a kid a certain day, and they would dump the outhouse door down and want you to crawl out, unless you could hold yourself back and wait till they righted it. These are kid things, but to me, everything was exciting, and also eye-opening.

But I did start to see there were other people in our town that I didn't know about. As a 12-year-old, I thought, where do they live? What is it like? Then I got to see some of the work camps—barbed-wire sites, really. What do we call them now? These were workers who came through seasonally, left their families behind. I don't think I ever did see them downtown in the small little New

England town. They were carefully monitored. They worked mostly in the fields where the other Anglo teenaged boys were not. All of a sudden, I could see this. My god -- the women, men, girls, boys in different places. There was this influx of workers who I'd never seen downtown. They live off-site of the fields. Anyway, a fascinating experience, a disturbing and jolting experience, for a 12-year-old.

I worked there five summers. I did get sick from mold exposure and other stuff on the leaves, and had pleurisy my last summer there, and have had it since. But it just was, for me, if I think of anything in my childhood, it was that work experience, seeing other people. My questions started emerging, like, what do I not see? Or, what is to be seen that's hidden from me? Or, what is to be cared about here? What moves people? Why are they here? Why are we growing tobacco? The kinds of ways that a town—it was a little bit like a Rod Serling thing—there's the town, and then there's this other life that's meshed with the town, but you're not allowed to see it most of the time.

I think about this a lot, because over the years, I grew into a very strong interest around labor, environment, public health, and how people live and work, and what they're exposed to. I know it sort of came from there. It's not as if I made a decision at the time, like, therefore, I shall study this and impact this. It more just sort of grew out of me.

Back to my family situation, no one in the family had ever gone to college. No one had any advice for me. I did get some, from the local high school. I was one of those "good students," or, "A students," or whatever, so I had a few teachers that were guiding me. I decided [chuckles] that I wanted to go to a college which was all women. I thought it would be more serious. I thought it would be more scholarly. I loved being around women. I thought, this is really what I want to do.

It just so happened, I walked—you know how they distribute information about colleges—into my guidance counselor's office and in came some information about this women's college, Elmira College in Elmira, New York. I applied, and I went, and it was somewhat ridiculous, on many fronts. It was all women, but it was in the vortex of, or in reach of, Cornell and Colgate. At that stage—that would have been '66—women's colleges were often part of the raw material of the male college scene, i.e., buses hauled women from those colleges to Cornell every Thursday or Friday, whatever.

I say this because a lot of people—even to this day—end up going to colleges for the wrong reasons. Friends of mine also got kind of disappointed and wanted to move on to other things. But I did enjoy college, enjoyed the learning. The good thing for me, my third year, I had applied and was accepted to be a student in England for the whole year, so I was at Sheffield University, which is my primo undergraduate experience. It was a red brick university—a working-class university—in '68 and

’69 in Europe, when things were afire over Czechoslovakia and France and the war in Viet Nam…there was a very lefty, progressive student movement. I was thrilled. I had a great year there. I was intensely involved in the academics, but everything else as well. Then I returned to the US and endured my senior year. [laughter]

Zaragoza: My third year in college, I went to the University of Kent in Canterbury, so very similar.

Nelson: Oh, yeah! I think the Brits—particularly now—are not exactly a model universe, by any means whatsoever, but I enjoyed the sort of working-class roots and history of Britain and all the struggles there. Sheffield is a working-class city. I would walk into these old factory areas and the old pubs. I found it very exciting, and very eye-opening for me in every possible way. I hung out with a lot of students who were sons and daughters of cleaning ladies and butchers. There was a very strong commitment—now, much lapsed—toward building universities that were accessible to everybody. That was a very powerful experience for me.

Zaragoza: What were you studying at this time?

Nelson: What was I doing? I’ve always been a kind of into a slushy kind of social science, i.e., I was sort of swimming through the arena of sociology and anthropology in particular, a little bit of econ policy, public policy, politics. I wasn’t so sure at that point that I wanted to become a teacher. I was interested in participating in a world where people explored and tried to impact the social conditions around them. I wasn’t sure it was through education or organizing or whatever.

My first job out of college was working in a rehab center in Boston. That was fascinating to me. I was working with people who were recently released from prisons, mental institutions, different places, who were needing support out in the community. I did that for about a year and it was very riveting of my attention, sort of just what people go through as they transition out of institutions, but also folks who are labeled, mislabeled, pigeonholed in all kinds of ways. This was before the disability rights movement that we’re more familiar with today, but it was really people in the “rehab” arena who, I think, were morphing that arena from a treatment zone to more of a human rights perspective.

Zaragoza: I see. And we’re in the early ‘70s at this point?

Nelson: It was 1970-71 in Boston. I then decided I wanted to go to grad school, applied for some MSW programs, was accepted in a couple places, Columbia and UPenn. I went to U Penn and then not long after I started, I decided to leave. UPenn had, I considered, a very conservative social work program, and I was really interested in community organizing, not so much the therapeutic end of all of that, and I was too politically involved to want to stay as a student, so after three or four months, I dropped out.

I moved to Penn State—the state college of Pennsylvania—which is another very strange community. It really looks like a movie set for a 1950s frat party film and it drove me nuts. But I was there for a variety of reasons. I lived in a commune there. Amidst all the frat stuff, there were these others, and I lived in kind of the wilder end of things. I then got admitted to a social science program at Penn State, and was there for many years.

At Penn State, in terms of other formative experiences, education itself is always formative, but I've always been more interested in what goes on around it, not so much in the confines of the classroom. So probably for me at Penn State, I think a very formative experience was getting involved in the women's movement more powerfully, particularly around assault, sexual abuse, domestic violence. I was very early involved in setting up a shelter in State College, which was much needed because then, and now, fraternities are very much the machinery of abuse in so many ways.

I was involved with that, and also involved in a lot of women's health issues. That was a very formative time. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* had emerged in around '72-'73. I was starting to go back into school around the same time. I was involved with Our Bodies, Ourselves the National Women's Health Network, and some local groups.

That was a very powerful time for me, both in my studies, focused on issues around public health, and I was particularly interested in small communities who were struggling to create and sustain healthcare services. That was the focus of my dissertation. But I stayed involved with the Women's Center in State College, setting up safe places. Also looking more and more into the women's health movement and its impact on science. At the time, *Science for the People*—the old magazine—I don't know if you remember that. It came out of the antiwar and liberatory science movement that started around Boston and other areas. At that time, the issue of science and community was really powerful.

My interest in a lot of things started to shape around the community as a knowledge seeker, knowledge bearer. I was particularly interested in the women's self-help movement, the women's health diagnosis movement, and got involved in the National Women's Health Network and OBO on different committees. I wasn't involved in the original writings of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, but after many years working with them long distance, I was invited in to do their occupational environmental health chapter. That would have been '73 to '78 I was at Penn State, and then I started teaching at Ithaca College in '78. So those five years were very formative particularly around public health, women's issues, and community health issues.

Zaragoza: What were some of the highlights of your continued development as a community organizer/activist/teacher/student/scholar/engaged human being at Ithaca? What were some of the things that continued to develop for you there?

Nelson: I have to say, I think about this now because I know of so many Evergreen students, and former students, look at higher ed as a place to work, and I don't discourage them; but I think now it's a tough scene. At that time, it seemed like a natural flow. I was finishing up a PhD in social science with a focus on health. The natural flow was, of course, … .get yourself a teaching job.

I applied around and I got a job at Ithaca College, which was a private school, which was not my preference. I've always preferred to be in the public sector. It was a progressive place. Ithaca is a very interesting place. I started there in '78, and your question was, how did I start to keep working on these issues?

Zaragoza: Yeah.

Nelson: Unlike Evergreen, there was very little team teaching, which is one of the key features of Evergreen that I most appreciate and value. I was teaching on my own pretty much all of the time; but the one valuable thing about IC at that time was we were invited to continually create classes. It wasn't a dictum "thou shalt teach this and nothing else." I was teaching intro social science things, but then I had a class I did on women and health, a class on race/ethnicity, a class on alternative health. I was spinning them out, and they would be sometimes one quarter for four credits, eight credits. I was able to, in essence, teach myself—because that's really what teachers are doing all the time—what would be a broader curriculum in the sociology of health.

I just worked so many programs, and that was exciting for me. I enjoyed working with other faculty, but I did enjoy the capacity to spin things out. There has been so much going on, particularly around this question of the community or citizen base of knowledge around health. If you're not a health professional, how do you engage with the field? Particularly around women's health, so much of what is now understood around women's rights, women's health, came out of the social movements at the time—even the basic right of access to your medical records. Back to Penn State, one of the big fights we had was with local doctors, who would not allow any of their patients to have access to their records. Now, that's part of what we expect and we push for. We were doing all sorts of stuff to unearth information about doctors, which we considered our privilege and our responsibility to know.

I jumped out of those formative experiences as a grad student into teaching. The classes, I felt, almost taught themselves, because there was so much material. There was so much going on. My

interest was in women's health at first, as a part of a subset of public health, then increasingly on class and labor, increasingly on environment. The thing about being at Ithaca College was that as much as I liked it, I did start to have some serious questions about whether, in fact, I wanted to be a fulltime academic for the rest of my life.

Around '82-'83—I was about 35-ish—I decided that I didn't want to be in academia, at least then, and at least fulltime. So after five years—and they were fine, I really had no complaints, well, there were certain things—I announced that I was not going for tenure. At that time, to be a young academic woman and say you weren't going for tenure….. I had the dean actually take me into his office. He said, "You are ruining your life. You will regret this every day for the rest of your life. You're making such a big mistake. We really want you to stay, and I know you really are fighting it."

But I left, and I left because I just wanted to try some other things. At that time, I was starting to get to know some really interesting women, who were working in the convergence zone of fascinating things in public health. One formative relationship will sort of signify this. That was when I was a teacher at Ithaca College, and then after I started teaching part-time at Cornel. Here I was back to teaching, this time in a Biology in Society program; but I also had been hired to work as an organizer and researcher in the American Indian Program at Cornell. Cornell is part private and part land grant, and in the land grant part of the university, they had just launched an American Indian Program—not studies, but a program. They worked directly with all the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Six Nations. I was the only non-indigenous person on the staff. What an experience that was.

I worked there for a few years while teaching. As I was finishing up at Ithaca College and going to Cornell—when you're in Ithaca, it's an academic scene—in that transition period from IC to Cornell, I got to know someone who became a very powerful figure in my life, a deep and lasting friendship, a midwife to my daughter's birth, and a dear friend and health sister. Her name is Katsi Cook [pronounced Gudji]. She's a lay midwife in the Mohawk community, a teacher, researcher and leader to many – across many communities.

I had asked her to my class at Ithaca College, and it was a very . . . it's so hard to describe this. This would have been around 1981, too. She came into my women's health class and other classes, and at that point, and especially now, she was an extremely impactful woman. She was just getting to know me via our joint interest in women's health. She came in and taught many classes. The students were always amazed, because she represented both an indigenous voice, and a strong feminist voice, and someone who believed in the capacity of people not just to resist American mainstream medicine, but

to connect with it, challenge it, and to make it real, and to deliver on promises of just delivery of healthcare. But she also sustained a very strong interest in spiritual and lay features of midwifery. So you can imagine the impact on the students, particularly in the women's health class.

She and I eventually became very close friends. She became my teacher in so many ways. She took some of my classes at Cornell while I was working in the American Indian program. Then she invited me to work with her at Akwesasne, which is the Mohawk community up on the St. Lawrence. Akwesasne resides and overlaps with a couple of northern counties, and over to Quebec and Ontario.

Very interesting political history. At that time, the Mohawks at Akwesasne had an armed resistance to the state of New York. It was an extremely militant and militarized zone, and I was in and out of it. I was one of the few visitors, and I was asked to come in to work on the women's health project there. I had to go through a lot of cultural training to understand what I was doing and where I was going.

Zaragoza: For us now, would the equivalent be the Zapatistas in Chiapas? Is that a decent comparison, or is it just completely different and un-comparable?

Nelson: I would say it is, but the scale of the Chiapas is broader, to some extent. There are definitely connections & links, but of course distinctions. *Akwesasne Notes* was one of the very important and one of the original indigenous publications on the U.S., in this hemisphere.

The issue of the role of the state and the nation's police forces and international forces around Akwesasne was quite significant. There was also internal strife between the traditionals—the elected governments—and some of the young warriors who were in a very different zone. I don't think it hit that scale, but yes, it was on the order of creating a zone for sustaining and enlarging indigenous rights. It has relationships with some enduring issues around fuel systems, extractive industry, indigenous lands, sovereignty, movement building.

I was invited in by Katsi. She and I went up and back, back and forth, between Ithaca and Akwesasne, which is about three hours north. It was a very powerful experience for me. I had to be continually educated. I had to spend a lot of time listening and watching and quietly asking questions. I had to be aware of all sorts of security issues. A couple times, I drove up there by myself to meet Katsi and other folks there, and that was fascinating because there were police everywhere. I was pulled over a couple of times outside the rez. It was a very strange and difficult, but challenging and exciting, time.

Mostly what we were doing from a science/public health point of view was to create a self-determining, community-based project on this central quest: Women at Akwesasne were trying to

recover their own birthing experiences—home births, safety-wise, etc.—and also nursing. The idea of a woman nursing her child. Breastfeeding should not be so outrageous, but they had been hounded out of it for decades by Western doctors. At the time, most women were hounded out of it. So they were trying to recover the birthing process and recover breastfeeding.

We were going to do a study on the recovering of breastfeeding, at the same time there was an uncovering of the contaminants that were from all the industries on the St. Lawrence and the Ontario side onto the rez. It turns out that Akwesasne, by virtue of a GM plant, paper mill, and other industrial activities right on the border of the Mohawk Nation. Those activities were spewing dioxin, lead, PCBs and other toxics onto reservation soil, into the air and so on, at the very time when women were wanting to start to breastfeed again, under Katsi's leadership and prompting.

So we decided, with great difficulty, that it would be valuable to have a breast milk study. It only had been done in a couple places before. In Vietnam after the war, there were scientists in the US who decided that the women there had been so exposed, they wanted to test their breast milk, and did indeed find DDT and dioxin in the breast milk of women in Vietnam.

We had a few researchers we came to know. Part of my work was to help build a bridge to some of the people in the Health Department and other places. We wanted to affiliate with and draw on the knowledge and labor of the Health Department without letting the Health Department have power in the situation, to help prevent activities that would be disrespectful of the sovereignty of the Mohawk Nation. So Katsi and I spent a lot of time in Health Department offices, trying to figure out those relationships. That was a long, demanding journey.

You can imagine, it taught me so much about, what is it like being a guest, an invitee, into a community where you know so little? I had so much to learn. So many mistakes I made or could have made. I had to learn what it was like to be called on when I was in the wrong place. At times, I was asked to do more than I thought I should, and I would say, "I'm just visiting. I don't know." Katsi would say, "No, we need you to do this right now."

I was in constant learning mode, both on the issue of how to do community-based work, especially my role as a visitor, but also the science issues around women's breast milk exposure, fetal development, and post-birth development of the child. What is it like to look at those issues from a lay perspective? Because I'm not in any way professionally trained, though I did a lot of sociology and health classes. My role was to help navigate. I was doing that for several years.

This is the other thing of me easing out of academia. I kept working with the Akwesasne Mohawks while moving to Syracuse, New York, away from Ithaca. Ithaca is great, but it's, I guess, again, academic-saturated, and I'm not into that zone so much. So we moved to Syracuse, which was a much more industrial, working-class community. Peter was working with the AFSC on antiwar stuff and on economic conversation issues. After my daughter was just born, I was still working with the Mohawks, but very limited funding there, so I took on another part time job… working with the regional COSH group. I just always assume everybody knows what they are.

Zaragoza: No.

Nelson: There were about 25, or at the best 35. They were Coalitions or Councils on Occupational Safety and Health. I got hired by the Central New York COSH, which to me, was a dream job. Tough job. At times we had no money. I worked for six months without pay. But it was working with the local labor movement on issues of worker health.

So my interests kept re-settling, re-shifting across women's health issues, occupational health, environmental health. I'd been working with people in different ways. I was particularly interested in the convergence of all those things, the tensions. How do movement come together, like how do feminists work with labor? How do they both work with environmentalists?

At that point, I was getting very involved also with New York State health and environmental politics. We had just created this labor and environment network, which was wonderful. It's still hanging on. It was a movement of all these different groups, and some physicians and science folks, about the issue of --- how do we shape advocacy on the human rights issue of creating and sustaining protections around environmental and occupational exposures?

Here I was. I was working with the Mohawks tangentially, working with the Women's Health Network and OBO, and then working on my paid job at the Occupational Safety and Health Council as part of a statewide thing. To me, this was—I don't want to say bliss—it was where I felt I should be. With the COSH, my job was as an organizer. I was called the co-director, but basically, it was full-on community organizing around workplace issues.

It kind of gets back to something I said earlier when we were not taping about my experiences—or maybe we were—working in tobacco fields. The question is, what's going on in there? What do you we not see? When you walk by a place—a building that maybe looks like an impermeable façade—who's in there? What are they doing? What's their labor? What's their day like? What are they

exposed to? What do they know? Do they know their rights? Are the rights that are declared by the federal and state governments empty? All of that stuff.

So in the COSH group, we basically did education and ground-up organizing around worksites, workers' Memorial Day, which is always a big thing, about creating a moment for the community to come out and see people have died at their work. Or, they have lost their health, or they put their children in peril by virtue of what they bring home.

I was there for five years. I loved it. It was difficult, but I met and worked with so many different people. Our board was all labor, particularly United Auto Workers and Steelworkers—those were the two key unions in Syracuse—and teachers' unions and nurses. It was just great. It was a very small organization. These COSH groups are often just one- or two- or three- or four-person shows, so our staff was one or two or three of us. I also worked with a new clinic that we, as a movement, were pushing to create in Syracuse, which is thriving to this day, a great worker health clinic.

Mostly the work was organizing, education, learning to spot things in the community, providing support and cover to workers who wanted to get information out of worksites, but could not disclose themselves publicly. One of the most powerful experiences for me was convincing the state wildlife pathologist—this will sound a little weird—who mostly was dealing with dead animals that were exposed to toxic contaminants, to come onto a worksite where they were building this monstrosity called the Pyramid Mall, which is there to this day.

Zaragoza: This was in Syracuse?

Nelson: In Syracuse. A huge site by the lake—old Onondaga land, actually, tribal land from way back. It was built on the side of a lake—one of the most polluted lakes in the country, Onondaga Lake. I was able to grab some hardhats from some labor guys, give one to the wildlife pathologist. He and I went onsite. It was just an amazing thing to go into the bowels of the creation of a shopping mall, with the ironworkers, the carpenters, the electricians, the people who were there at the base of everything; the people we don't see, the people who are doing the labor. And we're digging in contaminated land, and we're very concerned about it. It was like this formative experience, particularly for the wildlife pathologist, Ward Stone, who was used to working with animals, not workers.

I worked very closely with him, and then for some time about trying to bring to public attention the contamination at the site, which would, of course, impact the mall, but it was impacting the workers. Those were the kinds of experiences I had, and it was very compelling, and every day was

interesting, and there were lots of tensions. It also allowed me to learn the labor community in a different way. Peter had been involved in labor stuff for a long time, so I was absorbing that.

My family, though, grew up working-class and lower middle-class, and were decidedly apolitical. It was interesting for me to get to know labor. It felt very comfortable in lots of ways, but labor is an arcane land politically. And in New York, New York is a very complex political terrain in terms of labor, but fascinating. I loved it and learned a lot. Our COSH shop was in the building with the building trades, so I got to know a lot of tough guys. I mean, tough guys, who would not . . . what do I want to say?

Zaragoza: My dad was a pipefitter, and most of his friends were boilermakers and ironworkers, so I knew some of these tough guys. [laughing]

Nelson: Tough guys who I liked very much, and I worked well with. I think about this stuff not because as we're talking about at the college, where there's a politics of hyper-refined attention to all things that might be slights to people.

On the other end of the continuum, or relatedly, there's the many assaults upon people's bodies, health, integrities, future families and so on. I'm more interested in that end of the continuum. But I was always interested in, how do you bring different folks together? For example, every year in New York—and I was so proud of this and thrilled with it—we had a labor-environment solidarity conference. Fantastic.

I remember one time working with people who were leatherworkers and glove makers out of a particular old mill town near Albany, who were exposed to all kinds of shit in their work. From one contaminant in particular, a lot of the men had testicular cancer, a very difficult situation. I remember creating one workshop with them and some enviros and the public health people. I felt so challenged by that—and good about it—because you could really see people struggling to talk with each other. The enviros tend to want to be intensely engaged with the big picture, the principles at stake. Labor, not so much, because they have to deal with the grounded-ness of everyday struggles on a site, but also in view of the architecture of the labor movement, which is a whole different thing.

So we used to have, in our organizing for these conferences, labor and environmental strategists who would present things, like these lists that say, "Here are the labor people's, not demands, but highly promoted suggestions about how we organize this conference." Likewise from the enviros. The enviros would say, "We need to get locally-sourced food. We don't want to have this. We want to make sure things are recyclable." All of that, right?

The labor people would say, "We want to have childcare, and we want the childcare to be provided by union labor."

It was interesting, and probably, for me, one of the most significant learning experiences, because you could actually see two movements wrangle with each other. It wasn't always fun. New York is tough. I talked to labor people here and they would say at one time, "Oh, do you find such-and-such intimidating?" I said, "I worked in New York." Not that that toughened me into an exterior that can't be undone or violated or upset or anything. But these are tough labor people in New York, and strategic. So to see the labor and environmental folks together was great, with all its mishaps and bullshit and everything else. I was very involved in that for five years. Then, we moved here.

End Part 1 of 3 of Lin Nelson on 9-6-2019

Begin Part 2 of 3 of Lin Nelson on 9-6-2019

Zaragoza: Lin, you were about to start telling us about your coming to Evergreen. How did that happen? How did you hear about Evergreen? How did the application process go? What was that experience like?

Nelson: I have to say that the one thing that is a little different about me, I did not come here for Evergreen, I didn't apply to teach at Evergreen. Remember, I was living the life as an organizer in worker health, and I really came here for family reasons. My partner grew up on the West Coast. His family was in need. There were some things going on that he was needed for, and we moved here. It was actually pretty crushing for me because I was leaving a job that I cared about deeply. I had a four-and-a-half-year-old.

Zaragoza: What year is this?

Nelson: It was '91. It was actually quite difficult, and I mention this because a lot of people say, "How did you come to apply to Evergreen." I came here with no job, but I was still working long-distance with the Mohawks, I was doing some stuff with Our Bodies, Ourselves. My first year here, I had four part-time jobs—working with the Mohawks long distance on contract; worked with the University of Washington Occupational Health Program developing workshops; worked at Washington Department of Labor with Barbara Silverstein on a one-month intensive helping to shape their child labor project—I just sort of ran into her. The fourth thing -- I taught part-time at Evergreen in the MES program.

What happened was when I got here, I was still very much in an educator/organizer/community work mode, and here I am in a much smaller community. It's the state capitol, it's Washington, and

there's this college here. Peter and I were thinking, all right, you have been a college teacher. You might want to [teach again]. I heard these two guys on KAOS, Eli Sterling and Eppo—I forget what Eppo's last name is [Jon Epstein?]—and I thought, they sound like interesting guys. Eli was out of the MES program. I don't know if you know Eli. He does . . …

Zaragoza: the Procession of the Species.

Nelson: Eli is a very interesting guy, interesting organizer, so I met him before anybody. I said, "What's it like out at Evergreen?" He said, "You should go to the MES program." I went out and talked to them and Ralph Murphy hired me. I think my first class was in environmental health, the policy part.

I taught that and I taught another community-based program for MES, and then they opened up a position—this was back in the days when things were a little bit more fluid—Ralph thought what I was doing was good. They decided to create a position, they opened it up nationally, they had applicants. Lucky for me, I was hired into a job that I'd helped shape a little bit. I taught at MES for three-ish years.

I kind of worked my way into the job. People often ask me that because I say to them, "My entry is different than most other people's. I didn't come here for a [job]." When we were here, I thought, well, if I were to go back into academia, it would have to be a place like Evergreen. I knew about it, heard good things about it, was interested in the team teaching, I was interested in interdisciplinary work, the adventure of creating curriculum. I could not see myself in mainstream academia whatsoever, so I thought, well, if I'm going back into academic life, Evergreen would be the one place maybe I'd want to be, and that they would possibly want me. So, it worked out.

One of my first experiences in MES that was interesting—a couple things. Do you want me just to go on about it?

Zaragoza: Yes, I was going to ask you about your first impressions and early experiences.

Nelson: I'll mention two things. One was I loved the collaborative teaching. In MES it's a little leaner because it's usually two people, hardly ever three. I was suddenly involved in the world of environmental policy analysis at a much more demanding, atmospheric, erudite approach to what my own experience had been, which was more ground-up community-based stuff.

I enjoyed the teaching. I also enjoyed the experience of working on certain projects. One of the first things I did was—coming out of the labor stuff—I started to get connected with the Labor Center on campus—Helen Lee, Dan Leahy—and we got talking about "We need a regional Washington State environmental/labor/justice conference." I was very involved with that my first year. We did it in '92-

'93. Great experience. Helped me really know the region, and I had old labor stuff from back East that kind of translated to things here. I felt pretty comfortable working in that zone because that's what I'd been doing, the labor-environment collaborative organizing back East. I was out at LaPush meeting tribal leaders. I helped build the conference. What a wonderful way for me to get to know the region.

It wasn't easy. We had some disputes. There are always disputes and tensions and issues, but I thought the conference went well. At the conference, there were all kinds of people from all around Washington State who had different angling into this crosshatching of labor and environment, and what did the two movements have to say to each other and teach each other and challenge each other with? It's always tough. There's always some tensions and issues, and union protocol versus movement strategy. Everything you can imagine. I thought the conference went well. It was a very formative experience for me.

I re-met old friends from back East who relocated here who were movement activists in the region. I felt like that was part of what I could bring to the college. It's not just what's at the college, or spoken at the college, or learned at the college, it's what we learn together – out beyond the college's perimeter. I often say our co-teachers, our sister teachers, there are people out here doing this work, and we need to appreciate their intellectual lives and their learning and teaching, as well as just their movement stuff. We have to kind of learn how to understand, extract, appreciate, and apply the research of life that's out here, looking at community-based research—which is really a very legitimate area of research, particularly in public health. We need to look at it as a set of practices and efforts of collaboration—often, in public health especially, very significant highly regarded university systems working with people in communities.

That has been a key feature of my life and work here that started that first year when I was a teacher.

Something else happened that year that I'll mention as sort of . . . hmm . . . I don't want to say the downside of Evergreen, but part of, for me, the life of Evergreen, the life of being an environmentally-inclined person in the Northwest. My first MES retreat, they had them just as we got ready for classes. I was at a retreat, and I mention this because it signified to me some of the political jostling, on campus and around the community.

Two things happened at this retreat. One was all the faculty and all the new and second-year students, and I was just being introduced to the crowd. Two things came up at this faculty introducing themselves to the students. One, a male colleague who I was just meeting made reference to a former

faculty member as a "flaming feminist," and he didn't mean that in a positive way. I was sort of three people down the row. The students, as they introduced themselves, several were recent emigres from the Northeast, New York and New Jersey and all of that. Two things happened in those introductions. One, the faculty member who referred to a former colleague with disdain as a "flaming feminist." Two, I heard a lot of people dissing everywhere in the country except the Northwest, and saying things like, "I'm so glad I'm here. It's so beautiful here. Everything's wonderful here. Oh my god."

I said, "My name is Lin. I am a flaming feminist, and I'm really flaming right now." I remember standing there and saying this. "And I miss the Northeast right now. Maybe we left the Northeast because we didn't have the guts to stay back there and work on the things that needed to get done. Maybe coming to the Northwest is an act of lack of courage, not an eco-designation of some kind."

I looked around the room and I thought, okay, Lin, you just started this job, and you're with all male colleagues. Then I thought, fuck it! I was just in a mood. I didn't go in the room expecting, but I was quite dismayed but activated.

Interestingly, when the second-year students introduced themselves—oh, I had already taught a year. This was actually the end of my first year, so we were going into the second year. One of the male students, who's an Asian-American vet, middle-aged guy, said to the group—and I thought this was very endearing—"I really appreciate this program, particularly a certain flaming feminist in the room." It was his way of, one, calming me down. But I think also saying, "There's a lot of stuff going on in the region and we can't forget that this is not just a wonderful, happy, blissful place."

Afterwards Ralph Murphy came up to me and said, "That was great." I said, "Look, I did not plan this. It just barreled out of me because, one, I'm a flaming feminist. I knew this was used as a slur and a disregard, so I wanted to reclaim it. Two, I think it does the community, the region, and the college no good at all if people are here because they think it's a romantic holiday and everything is blissful here." I said to them, "You look at Commencement Bay. You tell me this is not an ecological disaster? You look at what's happening. It's very important not to have a kind of self-congratulatory eco-sanctuary, and "aren't we wonderful, isn't the rest of the world a pit" approach to things.

Zaragoza: Yeah, mythology.

Nelson: A kind of mythos—which is based on very little fact; the issues here are powerful—but also, who do we think we are? We just dropped out of the sky and we're here, and we're suddenly better than we were when we were in New Jersey? I said, "Then you get yourself into this mode of

sequestering yourself as better. This is not the way to do environmental studies or environmental work." That was how I started my early years here.

It kind of touched on a theme that has stayed with me over the years about Evergreen, because I think it's important to understand Evergreen is in the public sector, it has certain responsibilities and a place in the world, and that though it's in a pretty place, how shallow do we want to be that we only look at what a pretty place has to provide?" I said to the students at that time, "I wish I was working in Tacoma or Seattle, or anywhere where there's more daily gritty reminders. Do we not think we're connected to the industrial base?"

So there is a hazard with being in a beautiful place, actually, I think. People mistake themselves for the beautiful place. They think they have become wonderful because they're here. I find that deeply traumatic. I said, "There's a history here that is not so wonderful, if you look at the experience of indigenous peoples in the region." It just has bothered me quite a bit.

I was at another event where a group of students were gathered with Terry Tempest Williams, and it was this bunch of students and me. It was not a class. The question put to the group was, "What do each of you feel is the place that most speaks to you, or where you were most yourself?" She went all around the room. Most people picked very beautiful places—the seashore, different places that meant a lot to them. Not to discredit any of that. I understand the feeling. But I said—and I felt this at the risk of being oppositional, but I didn't say that—"I think I'd like to be at a landfill. The landfill speaks to me because I am part of that and I'm responsible for that. The flotsam and jetsam from my life ends up there. Maybe I'll end up there." I just had felt that it was important for people to not go for the pretty environmental calendar. That's an escape route, but it doesn't really help. And it's not true and it's not honest.

I think the strength of Evergreen is and should be complex, almost paradoxical. I love the eco ag people on campus. They're dear friends of mine. I love that we try to use the land wisely and what we stand for. But I think at the very moment we have a certain profile around that—and some students come there for the sanctuary it provides in a certain way—that we not get delusional about that. It's a place in a complex political ecology. Many people have struggled for this indigenous land. There's a history here, and we work at our peril if we take on the cloak of being special just because we happen to be here. We need to really not mistake the visual appeal of something, or the aromatic experience—whatever it is—for its truth and its complexity, and we ought not to take our chance of living in a place like this as the opportunity to see ourselves at the top of the pecking order ecologically. I find that

problematic. I find it still problematic to this day on campus that ecologically or politically some people take the ways in which the campus is protected as a sign that we are all special.

There was a faculty member, a colleague of mine, in MES who I liked very much—there's no need to mention names here—but she did say one thing that bothered me. She said, "I hope the Legislature forgets we're here. I hope that they leave us alone. We're like a private college and I really like that." I said, "I don't like it. We're a public college and we have responsibilities. There's a broader world out there and I know that the Legislature knows we're here. And if we don't pay attention to that, they're going to come gunning for us."

I think at times there is an isolationism, not so much now but in the past, partly understandably because the college started out as an experiment and there were a lot of risky activities. But there is peril in being too self-absorbed with all that and to be too self-congratulatory and not just see it as a struggle—as something that has to be always seen as experiment when we make mistakes, but not mistake it as a kind of glorified eco summer camp.

We were talking about another colleague—it doesn't matter who—in my early stages of being there I would walk around campus and say, "Who's here? What are they doing?" There was a very strong sense—that was in the early '90s—that the veteran and the founders—there was a lot of reverence for the founders of the college—I just felt that it was too much of a boys' club. I don't mean that just in a testosterone way, I mean that sense of "Aren't we wonderful? We'll maybe let you come in, if you comport yourself in a certain way." That's dangerous, I think.

But amidst all those concerns of mine I still very much liked—in the past tense—and like—in the present tense—the college and what it stands for. It's a work in progress, and sometimes it regresses. I would fight to the end that the college continue and survive, but not through empty exercises in self-glorification.

Zaragoza: What are some of the ways that you saw Evergreen change over your career there, and what are some of the things that you saw stay the same?

Nelson: I think things became more monitored in a certain way. For example, one of the things I remember from early on, Pete Bohmer used to put out these great e-mails. He was like the political lightning rod for things. I can't tell you when things changed. I know they've changed since 2017. There was much more of a flow and ebb, a kind of like "Oh, there's this stuff going on, I want to try this, should we go there?" That just seems to be not totally lost but constrained. The issue right now—this is

many decades later—seems to be more administratively controlled, more nervous, more contrite, more "let's not get too much messaging going on."

Zaragoza: Company line. Optimistic. Cover all warts.

Nelson: Exactly. And a nervousness about the faculty talking to each other. In the early days, there was a boys' club feel to it for me in lots of ways. At the same time, there was a fluidity. I was in MES up until around '96, and then I was pulled to the undergraduate.

I got to know more and more of the faculty and really valued a lot of the work here. Let me go back to some of the things that were strong, and what was the question?

Zaragoza: Stayed the same, changed.

Nelson: One thing that was very good in the early stages that has changed, I think, these yearlong, highly collaborative programs that had a solid base of students that worked together for years. My first program out of MES was Community Development with Russ Fox and Patrick Hill. Fantastic. Those two brought very different features of life together—different academic backgrounds—and it was a wonderful opportunity to sense what Evergreen can be in terms of collaboration, the persistence and longevity of a program, the deep attention to student learning, and community collaboration.

One of the things that went on was Patrick decided early on—I don't know if you ever knew him. He was the Provost for a while.

Zaragoza: I did not.

Nelson: Russ had said to me, "I think Patrick Hill could work with us." I thought, he was a Provost. Turned out he was wonderful to work with. Fantastic. Now I work with his partner, Maureen, in the sanctuary movement. But he said, "We've got this whole corrections system around us. There are prisoners"—this was out in Shelton—"who probably would like to maybe be in a college class someday." This was back in '95-'96. He actually started bringing students out to the prison out in Shelton—Washington Correctional Center—to meet with student prisoners there and they had seminars. Eventually, some of those prisoners were released and came to class. It was an incredible experience for me. So many things you don't pay attention to, and the correction system was one for me.

It was just fascinating, because when you have a class in community development, there's no limit on the kinds of threads you can pull on. We did a lot of community history and planning. Russ is a planner by training so he was more of the technical planner, locally focused. Patrick was a philosopher, so his approach was very broad. I came more out of organizing with a focus on public health. It was a

powerful teaching year for me, and one that really alerted me to the possibility and promise of Evergreen.

The students were involved in all manner of projects throughout the region—some of the threatening issues around forest, extractive industries on the Peninsula, people working in downtown Olympia on issues around homelessness and shelter questions. It was a very powerful experience, and it helped set me up to navigate other possible classes—like the one I was in with you two decades after that—that there is all sorts of raw material in the region to draw on, to engage with. I think I spent as much time or more looking outside the college than in as I tried to participate in programs. I think that's a value to the students if they're going to go out into the world of work, but also it creates a more democratic sense of knowledge and learning; that you're not just going to another scholar, you're looking at the scholars in the community. That was, for me, a very formative thing.

Back to your question about change, I think it's harder and harder to develop and sustain long-year programs with three faculty, not only because of enrollment issues, but because I actually think, in respect for and regard to students, they don't always want to make that commitment. I totally get that, too. They don't always want to say, "I don't want to be overly tied to one program for a year." For that time in '95-'96, it worked very well. But I do understand why people have needed—and the administration has pushed, but it needed to create shorter, more compact academic arrangements around one or two quarters, with maybe faculty moving in and out. That's a big change, I think, not necessarily bad or good but it has demanded different things of faculty as they plan things.

There are so many different changes. When the faculty changed over time, every new wave of faculty reconstructs the college because we're so collaborative in creating the curriculum. Other places, I think you could have layers of new faculty and they're going through their reviews and so on, but here, we call upon new faculty right away to be collaborative with us. It's an incredible opportunity for them and an incredible pressure and risk as well.

Now that I'm farther away from the college, I talk to Ellen Shortt-Sanchez, Anne Fischel], Martha Rosemeyer, Therese Saliba and others and I can sense the struggle to keep working on the curriculum, and realize you're continually creating this thing, which is a tremendous amount of work for everybody. I have to say, being someone who is moving back and forth between college and community, I've had people in the community say things to me like, "Oh, it must be so much fun to work at Evergreen." There's an image sometimes that we're just hanging out with the students. "It's really cool" whatever. I said, "Fun is not the word that comes to mind. Yes, there are some light moments, but it is work.

Hopefully it shows because we're creating curriculum that matters in real time with the students. We're not just throwing it at them." I've always bristled at the idea that it's fun to teach at Evergreen. It's positive, mostly. It's certainly enriching and challenging, all kinds of stuff, but fun is not the word for me at the college.

It reminds me of the continual messaging and communicating that needs to go on between the college and the rest of the world about what we do out there. When you talk to other faculty, they're saying, "Oh, I'm teaching xxxxxxx this curricular year and I'm doing some research next year." There's this kind of procedural and predictive feature of other curriculums. Ours, its strength and weakness at the very same moment, is its upheaval, which I think is mostly positive but very demanding, and especially demanding for the new faculty.

Zaragoza: As we think about your programs in the undergraduate curriculum, maybe you can tell us about some of your teaching practices, things you have experienced with, lines of inquiry, things that you learned along the way.

Nelson: Yes. I have to say, prefacing anything concrete, sometimes I look at all that. It's not that it's just a blur and I'm entering the Alzheimer's zone—although that's definitely possible—but things get kind of mushy in retrospect. But the fact is, for me at least, so much of it is fluid and changing that sometimes I look back, especially now that I'm retired—it might feel differently if you had asked me 10 years ago—I cannot say to myself, yes, what exactly were you doing out there? What did you bring? What did you learn? What did you try?

Zaragoza: In the sense that you're responsive to the context?

Nelson: To answer the question, what were your approaches to teaching? What did you try? I look back at it and say, yeah, what was I doing? Partly because you're looking back on something, and you can tell, look, I could rivet my attention on the Community Development class and I can remember certain—when you have 25-plus years of it, it's like mixed sediment that's been shaken by an earthquake.

The main thing --- you're always learning. So I see myself as much as a learner as a teacher. I don't know where the lines blend and rupture. But then I say to people when I say that "I'm always in learning mode," it doesn't mean I shouldn't be paid, because I worked really hard as a teacher. But the teaching-ness at Evergreen is much more a journey, more exploratory, more . . . what do I want to say? . . . not a straight line compared to most other teaching jobs. When I look back on it and think about it, I'm as aware of the things I've learned from others and/or how much after a quarter or a year's program

and I look back say, "Oh, why did I do that?" Or, "Why didn't I?" I've talked to other people about this, too. I have all the boxes from Evergreen, all my classes and the curriculum and the letters and the student evaluations. I was going to go back through those before we talked, and I said, no. But there is a way in which, yes, you can identify all your own learning and contributions, but it is so collaborative and it's so fluid.

And one thing I don't think we do enough of—I really count myself in this—is being a careful, retrospective, researcher and critical commentator on our own stuff. We jolt into the next year and say, "Oh my god! Now I have a new relationship with two other faculty." It's sort of my serial platonic polygamy idea about Evergreen. At times I don't think we take enough careful stake of what it is we're doing and learning.

Zaragoza: In terms of the critical reflection?

Nelson: In fact, this came up. I was on the retirement panel this summer, and Sam Schrager and I and a few others were talking about this. In the heaps of archives and boxes, what threads are there? What could we say have been the essential lessons of this kind of teaching? What's worked, what hasn't? That's a long way of saying I don't fully trust my memory or my judgment on this because it is so fluid.

But you asked about things I've tried to do that I thought were helpful. I am a firm believer in interactive education and workshopping. I think one of the best classes I was in—and I'm not just saying because it's you—was the one with you and Zoltán [Grossman] because we were very attentive—I had to go back and remind myself, what did we call that class?—Making Effective Change. Very workshop-oriented, very interactive, though we also did presentations, particularly Zoltán. It wasn't like we were hanging out with the students all the time because those workshops come from a lot of planfulness and dedicated efforts, like the public speaking we were doing, the problem solving. We were throwing these opportunities at the students, and I think most of them worked very well—ART [Activist Road Trip] and community change-making and so on.

But the workshoppiness of it all I think is very valuable at the college. Much of the work at the college in some ways has been exported, shared or borrowed from other places, partly by the Washington Center. Those kind of interactive—I think when I worked with Patrick and Russ, which would have been 20 years before I worked with you, on similar kinds of things—it was called Community Development, especially Russ. Russ always used to say, "I don't lecture. I don't present." He did sometimes. Patrick was more of the erudite, eloquent lecturer, but even he when he was doing it was very interactive. There's something about the engagement, the direction shaped around very specific

workshops and avocations, and/or the conversational style of even lecturing that I think is quintessential Evergreen and very valuable.

When I think back to things that I have done, I would say another program that stands out—because we tried so many different things—was twice I taught Local Knowledge with Anne Fischel. There was Community Development in the '90, Anne and I taught Local Knowledge in 2001-02 and 2004-05, and then I taught with you about eight years later -- all around community, local and movement issues.

When I taught with Anne that was distinctive because I'm teaching with someone from media, who's a filmmaker, who actually introduced some of her film work. I continued to work with her on a project, which I could talk about. But that was particularly taxing for me. Good, but taxing, because I have not a film bone in my body. I've told Anne this. She keeps wanting me to discover my inner filmmaker. It's not going to happen.

I think the other lesson from that is when you're working with lots of different people, you find or discover or push yourself to affinities toward things, but sometimes you find out, no, it's not my forte. I will defer to, or I'm glad to celebrate this, but I'm not a prime creator on this or that. There have been times in teaching where I think some people try to do too many things. It's particularly hazardous for some of the social scientists. Lori Blewett and I talk about this because we're two of the few women social scientists on campus. Partly because she's been adjunct and Evening and Weekend, she has taught with probably more colleagues than anybody I know. That means she continually has to adapt and morph her persona as well as her everything to whoever, because whatever you are, unless you're really hermetically sealed, is partly shaped by who you're with.

When I'm with faculty who are less sciency—let's say Anne and the filmmaking, then I sometimes come in as the social sciency person, but also with an interest in science, not to be a wannabe scientist or a fake scientist, but to pull on the offerings of science, particularly around public health. When I'm teaching with a scientist—one year I taught with Martha Rosemeyer and Sharon Anthony, who's a chemist who has since left, and Martha and I are in steady contact—it's a different kind of pull because then anything that vaguely had to do with public policy or anything outside the sciences, they would defer to me, or push me, or call on me. Martha is one of the most policy-smart scientists we have on campus. She's deeply involved with all things community science and policy.

But I would say who you are in the curriculum, or anyone—if I were to go through all the classes I've taught—each one pulled on me and reshaped me in different ways. I benefited from all of that. I'm

not always sure in the real-time turnaround that I personally always did justice to that, and maybe the insights you have or whatever you have to offer the class might come later. This is one of the weird things about the class—any class. It might be later at 2:00 a.m., it might be five months later when the program is over, you might say, "Why didn't I? That would have been a great opportunity."

I'm shifting between the strengths and the challenges at Evergreen. It has always struck me that there's a lot of raw material at the college that is not well harvested. Part of the raw material is not just the reviews of how did Lin do the last five years? We do ex post facto retrospectives of our programs; but I think it could be better activated so that if I'm coming out of a class and saying, "Oh, we really should have done x y or z," then we should make it our business to make sure that "lessons learned" help inform the shaping of future classes.

There's something that has worried me and I've mentioned this to other people. I can't quite see it or quantify it, but it's a sensation of, what is lost by flipping in and out of the curriculum so much? I think now—back to the issues, pluses and minuses, changes—I think the repetition of programs intermittently in a planful way really makes sense. There's too much learning by the faculty that would get that could get lost were we not to re-enrich and structure and deepen and change threads in the curriculum. I think that's important.

I don't see that as Evergreen becoming "too normal". I think it's us becoming more responsible. Because there is too much fluttering around the edges. I feel that there have been times—and I don't know quite when the transitions have happened—that there was almost a religiosity about—and Russ talked about this, too, because he was a firm believer of yearlong, collaboratively taught programs for the same group of students who never leave. Commitment there. Then he ended up being the dean for Evening and Weekend. I was thinking, well, that's interesting because he would not have—there were faculty in the early days who would not have supported Evening and Weekend as a concept because it was seen as too chopped up. So the college not only has a lot of learning going on. The college itself as an organism learns about things. Whether we take all those lessons seriously and apply them has always been a question. It's almost like a meta-learning. The community development area is a good area because the communities around us are always changing. They have different sensations of who we are.

When I taught with Carol Minugh—she and I just taught one quarter, it was great—we were doing participatory research, focused partly in Shelton, partly in Olympia. Here's another reflection on this good/not so good challenges stuff. When she and I taught that, we were both teaching pulling on

threads from other renditions of programs. I had just come out of Community Development, she was just launching Gateways at that time. We had very different backgrounds, but we got along and liked each other and so on. We decided to place ourselves physically in Shelton and here in Olympia/Evergreen. It was fascinating. It was just one quarter but it was really, for me, another great learning experience.

What was interesting, though, she and I went out to the Mason County History Museum in Shelton and they said to us, "Oh, more Evergreen folks." They meant it as somewhat cautionary. They weren't being rude or anything. They said, "Do you know that so-and-so taught out here last year? Did you see all their materials, and do you know what they did and who they contacted?" Carol and I went, "No, we didn't know and we haven't talked to him." They looked at us like, well, what the hell are you people doing out there? I thought to myself, yeah, what the hell are we doing?" Because these are real-time real places that – as academics -- we sweep into and then out of.

This gets back to the integrity of community-based studies, community-based research with all the different names attached to it. How do we cultivate co-learning with communities when they are in real time? They're not in quarters, they're not in semesters, they're not in rounds of students. They are in real time and we dip in and out, often to good effect. I'm proud of much of what we've done, but often like dropping things, writing our evaluations, going on to something else, and then don't even think through, who else might go out next year? Or us saying, "Who else has been in Shelton?" Bumping into the earlier class material turned out to be very good. That was not the problem. But we didn't know it till we got out there. I think the people at the museum looked at us like—in fact they just basically said, "Don't you people talk to each other?" I said, "Yeah, we do a lot of talking but in these little circles." That's the kind of stuff, if you're really doing community-based work as an educator, doing it with integrity, you can't live in the academic calendar. You've got to live outside it, you've got to be outside it, and you've got to talk to people. It's an extra labor in a way.

But I've had that experience many times because I've done Community Development, Local Knowledge. Our classes have been was very community-, regionally-oriented. I've done SOS classes, community-based research, all these different classes with different names. Over time it's sort of sedimented into me what's out there, but I've often felt that I have not been fully knowledgeable or responsible. Then there's a question, how do we share that with other folks?

The answer to much of this is that we created the Community Center (the Center for Community-based Learning & Action). Ellen Shortt-Sanchez is a gift to the college working on three-

quarter-time contract, underpaid, etc., who really is the connective tissue. Ellen and I have talked, and she as an organizer and I with that background, too, have said, "We can't just have a curricular dance with the community. We need to talk about building knowledge, the kind of accretion over time of what we've learned, what's worked, what's not, how different organizations are going, what they think of us, what they project onto us. I'm on a listserv with community-based research out of UW and others. Many colleges and universities have these community links -- there are national networks of them.

But the issue now—and I think wisely—Detroit is a good example, and you do some of this with your classes in Tacoma—you're out in places and folks want to see a little traction. They want to see responsibility. They don't want to be just research subjects. I think the college compared to most does pretty well on some of these things, but the very strength of the curriculum, the way we continually recreate it, means in some ways we're not all talking to each other, clearly because we're moving fast. There's a lot of dynamism and knowledge making out here, which could be valuable information for other faculty.

For me, Ellen at the Center to me is the absolute go-to person. Russ and I and Jacinta McCoy and others were involved in the very early stages. I think we started working on the recreation of what would be the third iteration of the Center back in '99.

Zaragoza: Would you talk about the formation of the CCBLA and your role in that? That was a driving question I had.

Nelson: Russ and I taught together in '95-'96, and others did a sequence of classes. Russ and I and Jacinta—who is a dear friend of mine that I got to know through a lot of different activities—said, "We need to do something to re-install, reinvigorate that kind of relationship." We talked to Barbara Smith, who was the Provost at the time, and she created a DTF. The three of us shared co-chairing; it went on for a couple of years; We did very extensive work with faculty all through the campus.

I remember most importantly that we convened a meeting downtown of about 25 groups who basically had a chance to say, "Here's what we think of you, Evergreen." It was kind of like one of these not so much a love-hate, it was more like "We really want to work with you. We really care about the college. Do you know we're here? Do you remember we're out here? Do you remember that two faculty came two years ago? Do you know about our project?" So, all sorts of issues around planning, environmental development, Olympia's shoreline, housing, homelessness, youth—everything—coming out of the community and saying, "We've had intermittent relationships with you, but we'd like something a little more steady and mature."

We wrote that up. We published a big report. Made lots of presentations to the faculty, some of whom were offended that we dare to raise the question that the college was in some ways wanting, or not doing what it could. I said, "A college has got to learn. That's what we're here for, right? We're learning that our neighbors actually invite us, want and expect more of us. We're public sector. We have a certain trust, a public trust."

This one faculty member followed me out in the hall and he just harangued me, and said that I was an upstart for daring to raise these things as a challenge. It was just a bizarre moment, but mostly, all the work went very well. By around 2001, we really pushed to get some money to create a center, and it was not easy. Barbara Smith was very good about this, and Les Purce was involved a little bit. I had gone back to my other stuff. I was really losing heart. Jacinta McCoy really, really pushed on it more than anybody, worked with Barbara, and some money was found. The Center opened end of spring 2003-ish. Jacinta McCoy died about that time. It was just horrifying and strange. She was one of the founders.

After the first few somewhat wobbly years, we were extremely lucky to get Ellen because she's a long-time organizer in the region, she's bilingual, she's committed to the community literacy projects. She's a fast learner, she's easy to work with, etc. I couldn't ask for a more wonderful colleague.

I'll say that for me the Center has really been, my co-teacher in a way, because the Center represents the growing composite knowledge of the faculty, our relationships with others, the sedimentation of learning over time, mistakes, triumphs, possibilities. If we pay enough attention to it, we won't then intermittently go out in the community and say, "Hi! We're here! We're wonderful!" But we'll say, "how can we as colleagues – teachers, staff, students, community partners – continue to learn from each other…and know that none of this work is a polished, finished product.

Zaragoza: Stuff around internships?

Nelson: I think there's been a long struggle to get the administration—the leadership of the college—to take the Center seriously. To support the internships that need to be continually shaped, to support the infrastructure of the Center, the community relationships. I kid about this -- but the truth is Ellen does the work of three people.

Zaragoza: Yeah.

Nelson: She's very good at that, and she knows things. She's just very adaptive, smart. I think at any one time, you might have a different sense of this, but I would guess 10 to 12 or more faculty are pretty tightly tied to the Center. Some of us are on the board or teaching classes where we link to the Center. The Center does have a kind of knowledge base that's vital. Like my experience with Carol when we went out to Shelton, now we would go to the Center months ahead of a class and say, "Anybody been working out with in this community? What do you know about it? What are the key organizations working on youth issues?" Several of us are on different community boards as well now. I feel that the college is in much better shape now on that issue of community collaboration than it was 15 years ago, but it takes work.

I've always been a big fan of—you and Zoltán and many others do this, too—kind of wandering tours in the community to get out of the classroom, out of the college, wander around, talk to people, look, look, look. Listen. Look at a building. This gets back to my worker health days. Look at a building and ask, "What's going on in there? Who works there? What do they care about? What are the risks to them?" Slow down enough to consider the political ecology of the community, and then its neighboring communities and its place in the region and on up from there.

I'm thrilled that we have the Community Center. I think it's one of the strongest features of the college. It's always, always worried me about its vulnerability. Ellen works very hard at fundraising, and she feels—I'm not wanting to quote her but I think she feels steady and strong about the sustained interest of the faculty. She always works hard at getting to know the new faculty and see how they would be wanting to be connected.

Zaragoza: Right, potential partners.

Nelson: Potential partners, learners, teachers. For some I've thought I would love to see a faculty member rotate in fulltime—just as in the Library in more flush times when we could do that—just as a staff person with Ellen and learn from her. Because each faculty member brings different things. Some folks are focusing on literacy, and particularly now, around immigration issues. It's a strong feature of Ellen's history and work, a strong feature of the Center. Ted Whitesel works closely with the Center, Alice Nelson, among others.

Zaragoza: [Ted Weitz? 00:58:06]?

Nelson:

Zaragoza: I also think—given now that Gateways has folded under the Center for Community-Based Learning and Action—that the faculty member who rotates in as the Gateways faculty also at least has that kind of connection and ability to learn from Ellen does and how she does it.

Nelson: Absolutely. Chico Herbison has been a key partner. In fact, talking to Ellen—because I go to the board meetings, I'm still on the board—Chico's work has really deepened and shifted the focus of the Community Center in lots of ways. Every person who comes in has something that they could offer that deepens and augments what's already there, and also just sustains more relationships of integrity out in the region. We're not seen as fly-by-nighters who just intermittently drop in.

I think the Center is key to the college, but that's me. It's more what I came from, and I think it's more in learning mode than other parts of the college. It keeps us honest and it keeps us more connected. Frankly, my feeling is it keeps us safer. When the crash came in May 2017, after all the Bret Weinstein saga, etc., were we not to have those connections in the community—and I went downtown to several of our partners—at Fertile Ground and the Sustainability Builders—I would say to them, "What are you hearing?" Then Ellen convened a meeting of several folks, and there was strong concern and worry on the part of our community partners about us, about the college. Also there was a sense of "What can we do to help?" But also a sense, "Yeah, we're hearing weird stuff and we want you to know there are repercussions for us, too."

During that time I decided to call the editors at *The Olympian* and said, "Could we talk to you?" The college was making no contact with *The Olympian*. Nothing. It may not be a great paragon of journalism, but it is our local paper. Several of us—Elizabeth Williamson was one of them—about four or five of us went and met for a couple hours with the editorial board because all people were hearing about was Bret Weinstein. There was some pretty weird stuff that happened at the college. You could look at footage. But we wanted to speak for the college more broadly, and also to offer some different vantage points. It was great. They ran a little editorial later that was much more balanced and I think the faculty should feel more . . . part of it is the time and energy, but I've always felt I'd like to see the faculty—my colleagues, especially younger colleagues—feel more empowered, and also insist on the time—to be out and about doing things.

And to be at the Legislature, if needed, because when the Legislature called a hearing on the college in June 2017, it was just Mike Paros, who was asked to speak—the only faculty member—and George Bridges, and our police chief who was very unhappy with the college at the time, and our

lobbyist who left a year later. So, we had four people of questionable positions talking to the Legislature about the college.

I then organized a meeting with our legislators in the 22nd District. We hooked with Gilda and Skyped with her. I thought at the time, who am I to do it? Well, who am I not to do this? I've had students at the Legislature. I've sponsored people there. I've been there a lot. I know some of these folks.

Zaragoza: You were, in the faculty legislative liaison.

Nelson: Yes. And I know Beth Doglio, a friend in the Legislature. She's our rep in the 22nd. But I felt like we ought to be—and a bunch of us went to the Legislature to sit behind the panel who were asked to speak on the college, like I said, Mike Paros. And Mike Paros was there because he was a bud of Bret Weinstein, so it felt somewhat "rigged". They were there, and then there were about 10 or 12 of us. I'm glad we were there; then we went and talked about it and we met with some students.

But for the college's future and safety, I think the faculty need to live outside of the curriculum a little more. It's really hard on the newcomers because they're so busy, because the curriculum is so demanding. But I also think the college leadership needs to engage with faculty as colleagues regarding the legislature and state higher education policy. I think college presidents live in their own ether. Their colleagues are other college presidents. It's not us. The faculty are not treated as effective adult engaged teachers who care about their work, who have something to say to the Legislature.

At this point, I know we have a new CFR person. Lori Blewett is going to do it this year as an understudy, so she and I have been meeting about it. She'll be great.

It's also a very interesting learning experience. It's not my idea of a fun-time to be at the Legislature, but we are public sector, we are state employees, in a public trust position. We should be over there more often, more steadily.

Zaragoza: We're in the town where it resides.

Nelson: We happen to be here. It's a lot more approachable than the Albany Legislature, I know that. I was there on Tuesday for Rachel Corrie Foundation. We brought Palestinian-Americans in. It was great. If you're trying to find political niches where you can make an impact, yes. So when you ask me about my plus/minus column on the college, I do think that for the life of the college and its future, but also the gratification of particularly faculty who want to do something that's engaged with the world, getting out and off campus is critical.

Zaragoza: I want to ask you one more question before we end for today. We've been talking a lot about the college's engagement with community. One of the strengths, as I experienced it in working with you, was the creation of community within programs. I had asked you about practices earlier, and this, to me, was one of the practices that I got to witness, be involved in, and learn from you as a colleague. Would you talk about the practice of creating community within programs as part of your work at Evergreen?

Nelson: I may not be as attentive to it as you think. I care about that, and it would vary in different programs. For example, the SOS (Student Originated Study) groups, which were my last teaching experiences, they're the community of students who are co-learners in shared space, but then they all have their community lives that they bring back to the community. I do have a lot of guidance and sheets and materials about, what are we each learning? How do we bring it back? How do we shape the learning together?

I do see everybody as co-learners, including me and other faculty, so I'm trying to pay attention to their learning, my learning, the connections, and what we can create together. Sometimes I'm planful about it, sometimes things just happen.

Zaragoza: I think some of those things happened because of the assumptions and orientation you have to working with people. It's not that you're rigidly doing a set of things, it's that you have an orientation that creates a particular kind of space that we're all oriented to in a way.

Nelson: Yeah. I think particularly with SOS class (my last regular class was Community-Based Research) I do have a set of things that I write about my expectations. Also I bring a lot of people into—in some ways it's . . . I overuse the word "organic" . . . my Community-Based Research class, for example, which I did in 2013-14, I brought a lot of people in who could also share their expectations. It's very fluid in some ways.

For example, Charo from CIELO, who I've worked with in the sanctuary movement, came in as part of a panel, as with others, who just share a lot of their work. My expectation of the students is they learn and take responsibility with those relationships. I think one of the ethical guidelines maybe that I have in a class is that everyone from Evergreen, especially students who are in community-based classes—like SOS, CBR, community development— have a responsibility to themselves, to the community, to us as a college. But I always say to them, "You are responsible to future students who you will never meet."

Here's what I mean. You're out there in the world—and I'm not expecting Girl Scout behavior—but I do want you to think that you're entering a river and you're exiting as someone else is coming in, and it's a continual movement of people in and around the community. We're all learners. Some are not paid to be learners. You are supported—or maybe you're being robbed financially at this point—we're in different relationships, but when you go out into the community, you're learning, and I want you think about what you're going to share with future students, via what are you leaving intact in programs at the Community Center? But also what sensations and impressions are you leaving out in the community that matter? You will be remembered, and maybe not remembered in ways that you'd like or that I would like. So let's talk about that. I really feel strongly that the college life has to be more fluid with the sense of the learning that goes on.

I can see this particularly working with Anne. This is where the film work is very exciting. In both the classes I taught with her, groups of students focused on homelessness in Olympia, both very powerful projects. Went on for months and the film work was, I thought, fantastic. That served as visual, informational foundations for the next classes. We don't often have things that tangible. It just strikes me that students have to see themselves as part of a process. In some ways, they owe it back to the college, future students and the community. There's a balance there. You don't want students to feel nervous about everything that they're doing. But you do want them to know they're making an impact. I'm very conscious of that, and I'm conscious of the community within the class. I don't know how I always convey it. Things that do come up is our struggling with how to be out in the community, learning and reporting back, where we also understand very basic principles around confidentiality, and that these are lives in the community, people who are struggling take on challenges, and some of it's not pretty.

There was one time one of the women I worked with in an SOS class a few years ago had a pretty rough time at Fertile Ground, and I knew why. She struggled to bring it to the group in a way I thought was very responsible. I was very conscious of these four people in the community I cared about who were having troubles. Those sort of things, I think you kind of thrash it through. I'm not always sure I do it the best way, but I'm conscious of all of that.

I was thinking, too, of other times where students have kind of acted out in interesting ways their own anguish with the process of co-learning in that way. I remember one day—this was around maybe 2016—when some of the stuff was coming up about safe places and safe space, and students

seemed to be very tender and vulnerable to things. I remember a discussion came up about anger and how to deal with it in a difficult community setting.

There were all sorts of stuff going on, that you hear, and one of the guys in the class—older guy, a veteran, great guy who worked with GRuB, one of the GRuB Garden veterans—very different from the rest of the class. He was not PC, he was not trying to fit in, he was not worried about every word that he uttered—and one day we were having this talk about anger out in the community and he said, "Here's what I'm like when I get angry." He acted out his anger. I don't mean physically, but he slammed out the door. Then he came back and said, "That's what I mean." It was sort of like not everybody emotes and exudes in the same way, and you're wrong if you go into a community to think that you're going to be able to install certain behaviors that meet your politically correct 10 principles of behavior. I liked that. I felt like you have to take some risks in that kind of teaching and not worry about everybody's hurt feelings, at the same time be attentive to hurt feelings.

I don't know if any of us—I've not mastered that. I remember in our class, one of my strange moments was we showed a film that was—

Zaragoza: *The Great Debaters*.

Nelson: Yes. Then we also showed the film—I think Zoltán brought it in—on sexual abuse at military installations around the world. There was this thing about this very intense film about women who were either in the military .. or women living near military installations who had been are abused.

We had an older women in class who eventually just disappeared. She acted out her anguish with the film because it was a rough film. But I remember her also—this is this issue of balance—because I was the only woman teacher at the time, she really directed at me, that we didn't prepare you by a sufficient trigger warning. Well, we let them know it was going to be a rough film. But there was a point where I thought, you know, I'm not here to make everything safe or feel safe or kind or wonderful, because it's not. I won't be held to everybody's comfort. I felt at that time, when I was at that sort of teeter-totter sense of, okay, maybe I should have said this or that, but also feeling that she'd created too much drama around herself. I think that's always worried me in community-based classes. We want to be attentive to each student's health and safety and integrity, etc., but none of us are the center of the story, including the faculty. I've struggled with that. When I look back on all of that, I'm never 100 percent sure I've done things very well. They are more efforts, and then more efforts…

Like I said, because we have the Community Center, it's also a sounding board for us. Ellen and I talk a lot even now because she's doing work with me in the community. I know she'll call me and say,

"I just wanted to run this by you." Because there's a lot of volatility out there, and our students get wrapped up in some of it. Some of it is very engaging and enlightening for them. Other times they go too deep into the drama. I've always struggled with how as a teacher, you kind of help them navigate all of that.

Zaragoza: If you've got nothing better to do. That's how I look at it! "I've got shit to do. I don't have time for this bullshit."

Nelson: The world needs something different from us than that.

Zaragoza: Yeah.

Nelson: I think with the community-based classes, because I came out of a lot of that, I've always been interested in us—or me—having a foot on campus and a foot out here because I think it tests us in different ways, and challenges us, and modulates us, and kicks us around a bit. I like that. Because when I worked with the Mohawks, I had people who tested me and challenged me in wholly different ways than I've ever been since. Who are my teachers? And it wasn't always easy.

I remember having people say, "We need you to do more!" I said, "But I'm just a visitor here." At other times "Lin, right now, make believe you're not in the room. We want you here to listen but don't ever tell anybody what you [heard]." "Okay." And I remember thinking that I needed them to be pretty consistently advised about what my role is, and also to react and challenge people when they abuse that relationship. No one's flawless. I remember Katsi saying, "Lin, don't let him push you around. He does it to everybody, and now you're the new woman on his list."

I think with community work there's all kinds of books and advisories about how to do things, but a lot of it is do it and learn and you will learn more.

Zaragoza: From you mistakes.

Nelson: I guess the one guiding thought I always have is everyone's your teacher, even if they don't know it, and even if they're not so good at it.

Zaragoza: Maybe we should pause there for now.

Nelson: Yeah.

End Part 2 of 3 of Lin Nelson on 9-6-2019

Begin Part 3 of 3 of Lin Nelson on 9-6-2019

Zaragoza: Let's go ahead and finish this oral history narrative here. You've talked to us a lot about your time at the college, things that you've done, that you've learned, that you taught, that you've been part of. How since retirement have you continued with some of this, or expanded into new territory? What have you been up to since you're retired?

L: I think of four threads. One is I continue with the Community Center on the advisory board. Whenever there's a meeting, Ellen pulls me in, or we talk. I know pretty much everybody on that board—it's a mix of community groups—and that's very important to me. I really value it. That's one.

Another thread that started at the college with Anne was when we taught Local Knowledge in 2004-05, the students had enduring, year-long projects on all manner of things, so Anne and I decided that we should have a project, both as modeling—in a way—but also just to connect with the students around learning.

One day, Anne and I, for different reasons—and this is the beauty of collaboration—we were in and around Tacoma. Anne knows I have a thing for landfills, industrial dumps, and everything else. We were talking about there's this old smelter that had been decommissioned and leveled, and a lot of questions about the impacts of it. Anne and I said—I will credit Anne, I think she said it first—"Let's turn that into a project." I thought, okay, that would be cool. She said, "I'll do some filming, we'll work with students." We pulled in a couple other students who were interested in industrial history and so on. We did that work for months through that year, and we had two students who went to research libraries with us, who went to meetings. It was great.

The plan and the trajectory was—it's sort of back to my issue of "What's going on in there?" The question here was, "What happened there? What happened to that smelter?" The smelter was a fascinating story because, one, it was one of the major industrial sites in the West during development. Two, it was the largest structure on the West Coast for many years. Three, it was one of the largest polluters of lead, Sulphur dioxide and arsenic. Monumental figure—structure—in a town of Ruston—which was 1,000 people at its height—individual municipality in the context of Tacoma. Very interesting municipal history, country history, pollution history, etc.

Anne and I just started noodling around with our students, looking into documents. We're still doing the project now 15 years later, which I'm not sure is a strength or weakness. But Anne has pretty much finished with the film, off and on. She is a meticulous, high-standards filmmaker. I'm a "Oh, this looks good. Let's go with it." I don't have the eye for it. I have learned a lot from her. Anyway, the

film has been shown many places in different renditions. We now have it online. It's largely focused on another site in El Paso TX.

The interesting thing was, as we launched the project, ASARCO Corporation, which was the company we were looking at, was going into bankruptcy proceedings. That turned out to be fascinating because it's considered, by Maria Cantwell, the largest, most significant industrial bankruptcy ever in the country, impacting 90 different sites. So, the bankruptcy proceedings were in Texas at Corpus Christy, the big site in Texas is El Paso. After our course stopped we started learning more and more. We went to Texas. We've been in Arizona a lot, we've been to Mexico. I've been over to other sites in Arizona, California and Idaho.

The unraveling of the story of one corporate bankruptcy and its many impacts, to me is fascinating. But that's me. I like the whodunit feature. I'm interested in corporate history. I'm interested in environmental health as it links to labor. That project really was born of a class and still goes on. I'm now more in research/writing mode. I've been in and out of the project for a number of different reasons. We have a Web site up that's of some utility. It's called *Their Mines, Our Stories*. Our tightest ties are with the people now in El Paso, rather than Tacoma. Tacoma closed so many years ago, all those old smelter workers are pretty much gone. We have met with them in restaurants and at the VFW bar in Ruston. We spent a lot of time there. We've met with a lot of different folks in the community and in the Health Department. That's an ongoing project that really was born of that class. Do I wish we'd finished it already? Yes, although its ongoing-ness partly is because of other things she and I are both doing, but also because you pull on the thread of a complex story and you start untangling and you go. "look over here, and over here and … you sink in.

The question has been for me in those different communities, what have they learned? What have they endured? How have they benefited from the labor movement, or not? Do those communities talk to each other? What did they learn when their bodies were the raw material of the bankruptcy, which is considered unprecedented? What's happened to those 90-some-odd sites post-bankruptcy, when Grupo Mexico took over the ASARCO? ASARCO now has a life somewhat in the U.S., Mexico and Peru.

You can get corporate-fixated. It becomes almost addictive. I think about the corporation much of the time, not so much that I know its interior that well. I think about its impacts. But there are so many different corporations, so it's just a sliver of the larger story of, what have we done to the planet and to ourselves? The communities that we've worked with have been incredibly hospitable to us.

We've kind of air-dropped in. What's being going on in El Paso is particularly poignant. The ASARCO site is smack dab on the Rio Grande, right across from Juárez. Even before all the immigration tension, the devastation to the region, industrially and otherwise, is just intense. So we have spent a lot of time with the workers and the families. I find this so intriguing on a—if you think of your own path in terms what you want to understand, way back when I was a feminist health activist researcher. Now I'm working with smelter workers—big guys, strong guys, tough guys—who probably don't have a lot of patience with certain elements of feminism, but I find such an affinity with them around some basic questions. What has gone on here? Whose rights have been violated? What health is been abdicated? How does it impact the families, the communities? What's the role of the corporate structures? What's the role of the state? All of that.

It's fascinating, it continues, and I'm intermittently in writer mode. But part of what happened when I retired, I came back, twice teaching—I left the college in 2014, came back and twice worked on [unintelligible 00:09:21] issues in 2014-15—and plus I had a lot of other things pulling on me. With the election, suddenly—for all of us—things changed dramatically. In the fall of 2016, I got connected to other community activists around what was going on in immigration and sanctuary pressure here on City Council. Then Bob Ziegler, Anne, Peter, Charo and others created the sanctuary group.

I've been very involved in that, and it's been very absorbing. I knew so little about immigration. I'm with people who know lots more. I pulled away from it for a few months to do some other things. But my big thing there was to work with people on the legislative front. The legislative stuff is tedious and taxing, but this is a movement issue. My feeling is I may not have a lot of excitement and interest around legislative things, but they matter. They impact people's lives, particularly people who have less power, and if those people want to show up in the Legislature, I can damn well do it, too, and be there as a friend, ally, supporter, solidarity. I spent some time with WAISN up in Seattle.

Zaragoza: Tell us what WAISN is.

Nelson: Washington Immigration Solidarity Network. Monserrat Padilla is one of the key people who I work -- kind of put our local group in the context of a movement. My feeling about this goes back to some teaching issues. Communities can get quite inbred and quite taken with themselves. If you have a state capital here on the West Coast—we're one of the more Anglo-intense state capitals—how can you be an immigrant solidarity movement without working with immigrants in solidarity in the region, where conditions for people in Central and Eastern Washington are very different than here, or on the Peninsula?

It's been a great experience. My big thing was to try to work with others to figure out, how can our community group, with respect, connect to a broader movement, and also be a host around the capital? For two years, but particularly this last year, we were very involved with organizing a big Advocacy day for 200 people, going to the Legislature, meeting with all these different districts, workshops, a lot of mutual education in the room. We met at the State Labor Council building downtown on Ninth.

That's been an important part of my life, and yesterday I was in on a county discussion on—I mentioned earlier, ICE suddenly appearing here in Thurston, which is not supposed to happen. Now our group is pushing for an investigation, and has created a document. I can send it to you. Bob Ziegler, Peter, Maureen, a bunch of different folks have been involved. Our group is reasonably strong because of one very strong woman, Steffani Powell, who's an immigration attorney. Without our work with her, I think we wouldn't be so strong.

So, I've got this research going on, and the sanctuary work has been really important to me. The other thing is three years ago, I was asked to be on the Rachel Corrie Foundation board. How could I say no? Rachel was a very impactful person in my life, and I don't mean because she died in Palestine, I mean before she went to Palestine. I've followed the organization, I've been in and around it. I know her parents pretty well. Patty Mosqueda had asked me to do it because she was on the board at the time.

I was eager to do it. My focus has been on some of the community stuff, the downtown mural, working with the muralist, Susan Green in the Bay Area, working with scholarship stuff at the college and in Gaza, working on Gaza support fundraising efforts. Right now, I'm trying to draft a proposal to Open Society Foundation for funding for RCF because we've kind of run dry. That's been an eye-opening experience.

Ellen's on our advisory board on projects and programs with me. It's been an experience living in so much of an organization. What a struggle it is to sustain an NGO. What is it like when you have an NGO which is a legacy NGO, created by two wonderful people—Cindy and Craig Corrie—who like me in their seventies, and they're trying to figure all this out? Their struggles as a couple, as a family to sustain things, the struggles of the organization to go on with very few resources. Andrew Meyer was an Evergreen student—who is now at UC Santa Cruz—is back here working part-time with us. He's great.

I'm been a bit involved with the Legislature on RCF efforts . I organized a meeting and we met Wednesday for a while with Rep. Laurie Dolan, Rep. Beth Doglio, and Senator Sam Hunt about the

efforts of Israel and the Israeli lobby in the US and Israeli interest to push 20+ pieces of anti—BDS [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions] through state Legislatures. Olympia, Washington State has not succumbed, but there's pressure, so we wanted to meet with legislators about that and a few other things.

This is the benefit of being retired. I feel like I'm running a lot of different jobs and the boss man is me myself. I'm never happy with what I'm doing because we could always do more. Retirees can be valuable people in the community. They can also be a kind of tyrannical gerontocracy. There are meetings at our sanctuary group—mostly women and mostly gray-hairs because we have the time. We're not better people, we have the time and maybe some more experience. So there is something challenging about being an elder in the community, knowing what you can contribute, and also knowing your place.

That retirement panel at the college, I think, is worth going to, to hear. There were six of us who chewed on, what are we doing now? But also, our thoughts about how to better support faculty, particularly in stages where they're getting ready for retirement, and how to have things more transparent around the process of retirement, which is actually burdensome. There's a lot of paperwork and stuff. Then there's the issue of, well, what do I do now? And the issue of taking care of each other.

There's something about this stage of life, too, looking around to other folks in the community and maybe being able to see more deeply into their situations because we have more time. There's something about -- I don't live in the curriculum anymore. Although I swear, on my calendars, everything is marked by Evergreen weeks. I actually mark it off. Because then I also know what my friends are doing.

So, that's my retirement life, those different threads.

Zaragoza: Any final words that you would like to share with us? I remember when we talked on the phone last night, you talked about wanting to talk about your initial impressions, and then your exiting or continuing relationship impressions. I wanted to be sure that you spoke to those before we finish, and to see if you have any final words.

Nelson: I think I probably threaded them through somewhere. My initial impression, that one story about meeting with a group of new MES students, who were extolling the virtues and the beauties of the Northwest, and basically dissing other parts of the country. That told me a lot about what I needed not to do and what I needed to resist. And that the beauty of a place can also be its . . . not its downfall, but can be a challenge if people are too consumed with the surface. I love the beauty of the Northwest.

That's not the issue. And I kid about going to landfills, but it's more, I think, when I came in, was a sense of I do not want to be too self-absorbed in a self-absorbed college. That's what I was feeling.

Upon exit of the college, given the college's troubles at this point, I think it's urgently important for everybody not to be just too absorbed at the college because the college's life is linked to the broader public. The legislators who I talk to with these problems, I would go to Beth and to a couple guysin the Legislature, different people—and I would say, "You'll let me know if you see some signs that something's really going to go awry, won't you?" Beth said, "Absolutely."

So I think the college is safe, but not healthy. That's how it feels to me. To say I'm dismayed with how Bret Weinstein handled himself is an understatement. Not that he didn't have some legitimate grievances, but to watch that drama unfold, to see him go to FOX News, and to Whatshisname's show?

Zaragoza: Tucker Carlson.

Nelson: So Tucker's sitting there with Bret Weinstein, and up here on the screen comes

Zaragoza: Rashida?

Nelson: Rashida Love. Her name comes up, and I was so disgusted that Bret, who claims to have all this political savvy, would be so quote "naïve" that allowed that name to be shared publicly. It had impacts on her, profound impacts.

Zaragoza: She received many death threats, a lot of flak, not enough support, and has left the college.

Nelson: Yeah. I had had her in my class that year as a visitor, because I had heard Emily [last name?] come in and talk about community-based work, because she has a background. She was incredibly valuable to the college and a wonderful person. Worked in the labor [unintelligible 00:22:34]. I just thought, how could you do something [like this?]?

So I have come away after the drama at the college very concerned and dismayed about the college's future. Again, not because I am a bona fide 100 percent Evergreen booster. I think it's a place that's always learning, making mistakes, but it's a valuable place that deserves to be protected in public sector higher ed. I'm on the outskirts of it now, but I'm in touch with the Community Center and others and try to scope things out with people about what they're hearing and learning, and fears about the college. I think the faculty who are there now are doing a tremendous job of holding things together. I know it's not easy. When I talk to several of my friends there, I can tell the stress and strain of it. It's hard to be positive when you're just wondering if the place will continue. Particularly for the young,

newer faculty. I can look at new faculty and see they bring so much and they risk so much just being here. We're asking a lot of them to be in a trust relationship with us when they're not sure it will continue. That concerns me. I'll end there.

Zaragoza: Thank you very much, Lin.

End Part 3 of 3 of Lin Nelson on 9-6-2019