**Susan Preciso**

**Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal**

**The Evergreen State College oral history project**

**January 7, 2022**

**FINAL**

**Fiksdal:** This is Susan Fiksdal. I'm with Susan Preciso for her oral history on January 7, 2022. Hi, Susan.

**Preciso:** Happy New Year to you.

**Fiksdal:** This will be a lot of fun for the transcriber with two Susans, but our voices are different, so I'm sure it will work out. I wanted to start this interview by asking you about any childhood memories that contributed to your thinking about a career, your thinking about going to college, and something about your parents and where you grew up.

**Preciso:** I was born in Portland, and then my parents and my sister and I moved to San Diego when I was, I guess, two. I was in San Diego until I was 11.

My parents were voracious readers. Always. We had books everywhere in the house. Always. In fact, this one memory is a little later. We'd moved to Portland and we went to the library every week. The whole family. I'm 16 years old and they're interviewing our family as the library family. It was in the paper.

**Fiksdal:** Wow!

**Preciso:** I just think, oh, my gawd! I'm the nerdiest kid in high school! [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** You were a little embarrassed by that.

**Preciso:** You bet! So, me and my five siblings and my mom and dad are in this picture, but it's very sweet.

**Fiksdal:** It is. You must have been the only ones that went every single week.

**Preciso:** Probably. When I was young, Mom and Dad never cared about having a television. We just didn't have one until somebody gave Mom and Dad one because they got a new one. I was maybe eight or nine before we had TV that we watched all the time.

I always was a reader, but I hadn't, as a kid, thought about, when I grow up, I'm going to be a teacher.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. What did your parents do for a living?

**Preciso:** My dad was a plumber and Mom didn't work outside the home until I was already grown and gone. Dad had some college. Mom didn't. When she graduated from high school, she had a scholarship

to Seattle U and she couldn't take it because her father was really ill, and it was the war, and she could get a job, and that's what she did.

I married very young. I was 19 when I got married. When I was 27, I had my third child, and when she was five, I was home with the kids, I loved being home with the kids, but it just wasn't enough. The privilege that I had is that my husband was supporting us, and was supportive of me saying, "I need something that's not this." So, I started taking classes at Portland Community College, and then went to Portland State, and I just went fulltime until I finished my master's degree when I was in my early thirties.

When I was a graduate student, I was a TA, which meant that they gave me a class, and I'd never taught anything. They gave me a comp class—Writing 101—and, in a group of other young graduate students, we learned how to teach a class. I remember the first time I was just terrified. I thought, I'm not equipped to do this. But then I realized I actually did know more than the students who were in my class and I had something to teach them and a way to do it.

**Fiksdal:** One good thing was they must have given you a syllabus, they gave you the book.

**Preciso:** Oh, no, no. We made our own syllabus. But they did give us the required text, and we met weekly to talk about what we were doing. We had a faculty who was coordinating all of that and she was terrific, but she really wanted us to figure out what worked for us in what was our teaching style. There were things that we needed to accomplish over each quarter with the students, but we had some autonomy, which was useful.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, a struggle, but useful. I'm just wondering about your teachers. When I went through school, I didn't have female teachers or professors until the end of my undergraduate career. In graduate school—the first time anyway—I had all men. It was hard for me to figure out at Evergreen, how to teach. All my models were these men.

**Preciso:** Right. [laughing] Most of my college teachers were men, but I had some very good women, who were also influential for me, and supportive.

**Fiksdal:** That helped.

**Preciso:** That helped.

**Fiksdal:** What was your master's in?

**Preciso:** My master's was not in composition. My master's degree is in literature, in English and American literature.

**Fiksdal:** What did you plan to do with that master's degree?

**Preciso:** I really wanted to teach. The master's program was a full two-year program. During the second year of the program, my husband took a job in Tacoma—I was in Portland—and he just commuted, and I did school because I wanted to finish.

I had the three kids. I remember one time I was taking a class on Melville. I'm sitting there reading *Pierre; or the Ambiguities*, which is incredibly difficult—big, fat one—at a volleyball tournament. My daughter was playing volleyball. [laughing] It was nuts. But I could quickly identify with my adult students at Evergreen and at the community college because for one thing, they're juggling a lot, but for another, it's exciting for them and it was exciting for me to be intellectually engaged and really talking with people about my thinking about things, and about literature and all kinds of stuff.

I get that, and I've seen that in my students, where they think that they're not going to be good at college and they're scared about it, and then, they just realize they're smart. You could see it in their faces. They change. You've seen it, too, I'm sure.

**Fiksdal:** I've seen it and I experienced the same thing, Susan, because I left Evergreen after seven years of teaching and went to the University of Michigan for a completely new degree in linguistics. I had to do a master's and then a PhD there. I was only there three years, but I did as much as I could.

But I also had that same realization. Wait, I can do this. In fact, I've got some better ideas than a lot of these younger students, and I didn't have all the issues. [laughter] I had a baby and a four-year-old, but it was a wonderful opportunity. I really do understand that.

You graduated from Portland State. Your husband was in Tacoma. Was that when you moved?

**Preciso:** Once I finished my degree, we moved. I got a job teaching at Pierce College, and I had another job teaching at Highline College.

I thought that that was where my niche would be, but after the second year I was at Pierce, I was teaching with Phyllis Wong, who was married to Les Wong, who was a dean at Evergreen. Les said, "You should apply for this temporary position." It wasn't even a writing center. It was training tutors and working with programs. So, I came as a visitor for a year.

At the end of that year, once again, enrollment was an issue, so the college turned to adult learners, and there were the two team-taught programs and I got to teach in one of them.

**Fiksdal:** Was that first one with John McCann?

**Preciso:** It was.

**Fiksdal:** I thought that was the only one that was taught.

**Preciso:** No, there was another one that had a visitor. It was more science, and it was two visitors. John and I were both visitors as well. One was a physician from Ecuador who had a background in public health.

**Fiksdal:** It was José Suarez.

**Preciso:** Yes!

**Fiksdal:** He's a good friend.

**Fiksdal:** He was terrific. I can't remember who the other guy was. But there were the two programs, and both programs were over-enrolled—we had 55 students—so it was a need that was absolutely there.

**Fiksdal:** And they were quite different than what was being offered in the fulltime curriculum.

**Preciso:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** Did you recruit for those also?

**Preciso:** We did. We drove around in a van and went to community colleges and libraries. Sometimes there were four faculty and Les Wong, and maybe three students would show up, but we continued to do it.

The first time we had an information night on campus at Evergreen, you know that big space that was on the first floor of the library where there were faculty offices all around, where Washington Center was? It was a pretty good-sized space, and it was full of people. Full of people. I had to get up on the top of a table because John was really tall. I couldn't see over him. [laughter] There was a lot of interest from working adult students locally in Olympia from the get-go.

**Fiksdal:** Those were both year-long programs?

**Preciso:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** Did you do the same thing the next year?

**Preciso:** The next year, I was still a visitor. Les had hired two other people to teach the program that John and I had been teaching, or something like it. Nancy Taylor asked me if I would be a visitor in the fulltime program because Jin Darney was going to be teaching this Victorian studies program with Nancy and Jan Ott. I had Victorian literature as a background, so I was asked to come. That was such a blessing, I can't even tell you.

These three women really acculturated me to the college in an important way, and much of what I kept as my practice really went back to teaching with Nancy and Jan. Particularly Nancy—and Jin, too—because we absolutely had faculty seminar every week, and took that very seriously, and I have continued to make that my practice.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, really? That's terrific.

**Preciso:** Some people don't do that anymore.

**Fiksdal:** No, that's right.

**Preciso:** But I found it so useful. In 28 years, I've only taught by myself for one quarter. It was a 19th Century American lit class. I had a good time teaching it, but I missed having other people to talk about it to. It was Jules Unsel and Sarah Petersen in the library who said they were interested in what we were reading, so we had faculty seminar anyway.

**Fiksdal:** That's terrific, so they read the books with you.

**Preciso:** Yeah. It's really important, I think.

**Fiksdal:** That happened to me one year, too. I joined up with Sandra Simon and Eric Larson because I had no one to talk to. Our programs started overlapping a little bit, but that faculty seminar was terrific. I did have to read a lot of books. [laughter]

**Preciso:** That's right. That's what we do, so there you go.

**Fiksdal:** And you're a reader.

**Preciso:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** I came on as dean of our new Parttime Studies program in 1996, so I'm trying to figure out how long you taught before you joined that.

**Preciso:** The first program I taught, with John, was '93-'94. Then I taught with Nancy and Jin '94-'95. I'm looking at my list.

**Fiksdal:** That was fulltime. Right?

**Preciso:** That was fulltime. Then I went back to Evening and Weekend and taught with Phyllis Wong. We taught another year-long program. That was '95-'96. The first year you were the dean, I taught with Evonne Hedgepeth, From Adam and Eve to Thelma and Louise. That was another year-long program.

**Fiksdal:** Talk about attractive. What a great name. [laughter]

**Preciso:** It was. It was really fun. From Adam and Eve to Thelma and Louise was about relationships. Evonne is a psychologist. You can drown in books about relationships, so that was interesting. The year that I applied to be a regular faculty was the year I was teaching with Joli Sandoz. We both had applied for almost the same position. But we managed that, I think, well.

**Fiksdal:** That was really tough. We only had five positions and you had a lot of experience with Evergreen at that point. I was thinking, though, that a lot of your career teaching in, what was later Weekend Studies, had to do with history.

**Preciso:** Almost from the get-go. Not every program, but certainly, with Nancy and Jin, we were teaching Victorian studies basically. Paradigm of Progress was what we called it. I've always been interested in history, of course, but I got better at doing history, not just reading, but figuring out how to research and how to teach about it.

**Fiksdal:** That's huge project--you did that without going to school. You have to figure out how historians do their work.

**Preciso:** Right, but that's also what we ask students to do.

**Fiksdal:** Yes.

**Preciso:** We really stress that whole idea that you can pick something you're curious about and start digging in.

**Fiksdal:** Did you ever teach with a historian?

**Preciso:** Yes, Nancy Taylor.

**Fiksdal:** Yes, of course.

**Preciso:** [She] is an historian. John McCann is an historian. Ann Storey is an art historian, which is a little different. Sarah Ryan is labor history, and we've taught many times together. Tom Rainey and I taught together.

**Fiksdal:** When you taught with Tom Rainey, that must have been fulltime, or was it later on?

**Preciso:** It was after he retired. He retired. He had his Post Retirement Contract forever, and then he came back as an adjunct faculty because he just couldn't stand it. Right?

**Fiksdal:** He just had to keep teaching.

**Preciso:** Yeah. We taught a year-long Victorian studies program. It was wonderful.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, I didn't know that.

**Preciso:** But the thing with teaching with Tom, he's a fabulous lecturer, and I do shorter talks and do workshops more often. We had this thing where he would start lecturing, and it would be like, "Tom, time!" [laughter] He's such a good sport. He was just terrific to teach with.

**Fiksdal:** It's interesting. He had to adapt to a different style because he was teaching with you, and you knew a lot more about Evening and Weekend students.

**Preciso:** Yeah, and he'd been. I think he taught with Mark Harrison, he taught with Allen—did he teach with Allen Olson? I can't remember, but he taught with a few Evening Weekend faculty. He loved teaching in the Evening and Weekends because it's an interesting group of students.

**Fiksdal:** It is. In the beginning, when you were teaching in Parttime Studies, in those early years, we were aiming to attract adult students with our motto "Parttime studies for fulltime lives."

**Preciso:** It was on the bus!

**Fiksdal:** Buses everywhere. [laughter] I just wonder if you remember having mostly older students, or what the mix was in those early days?

**Preciso:** In the early days, it was mostly older students. There would be a few younger students. Depending on the year, it continued to be mostly older, and then it became maybe half and half. I remember in particular one of the times that I was teaching Work and the Human Condition with Stephen Beck, which we taught three or four times.

We had this wonderful combination of adult working students and younger students, who were also working. That's the other thing.

**Fiksdal:** That's something that people forget is that the students worked.

**Preciso:** Yeah, we think of it as all working students are the late thirties, early forties, or something, but these are 19- and 20-year-olds who also are working. But the younger students and the adults really began to make interesting partnerships in research projects. It's fascinating to see—and hear—from workers and students who are 20 talking with workers and students who are 50. They bring a different kind of experience, to the seminar, in particular, I think.

**Fiksdal:** I think in seminar, I really noticed that when I came to observe that the older students had a much broader perspective, and seemed to have a little more—well, they were very dedicated students.

**Preciso:** Yes, they were.

**Fiksdal:** Let's just say they had read the material and thought about the material. [laughter]

**Preciso:** I forgot that you came in and you taped a seminar.

**Fiksdal:** I did. It was a key part of my book that I wrote on seminars later. That seminar was key for me in a lot of ways. I read that text later because I was so interested in the Aunt Jemima marketing—

**Preciso:** Oh, *Slave in a Box.*

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, *Slave in a Box*. I remember part of the seminar was about the author because no one could tell who the author was. The author had initials for their first name, and how that mattered to them.

**Preciso:** That was interesting, yeah. They tried Googling and they couldn't find it. I think Joe Tougas found it. I think Manring was a man.

**Fiksdal:** It was a man. I remember you found out. One of the things I wanted to talk about was those early years of the Parttime Studies program because one of the things you all did so well was plan programs together. Once you became regular faculty, you taught with a lot of adjuncts, I think partly to

give them a job, but also, that was the pool, so you were all very creative, I thought, in coming up with a curriculum that would work for the students. I wanted you to talk about that a little bit.

**Preciso:** I think our advantage as a planning unit was that we came from all different disciplines. Karen Hogan and I taught Victorian studies.

**Fiksdal:** What was her discipline? I can't remember.

**Preciso:** Evolutionary biology. And I taught with Allen Olson, who's a mathematician, and Allen Mauney. It's easier to plan across disciplines if you're in the same room all the time.

**Fiksdal:** Right. You knew each other.

**Preciso:** We knew each other. As you know, over the years, you figure out who you might teach well with and who maybe you shouldn't try to plan with.

**Fiksdal:** Exactly. What were some of the best programs? I know you repeated some, and for good reason.

**Preciso:** I loved every program I taught. You fall in love with them. But the ones I really cared about doing again and had teaching partners who wanted to do it again, with Sarah Ryan, The Age of Irony. We taught that at least four, maybe five times. We taught The Age of Irony one time, then four years later another time, and then when John Baldridge came and he was a new faculty, we thought it would be a good thing to have him join our team. For one thing, he was a really good social scientist. We learned from him, but he also learned from us how to do a good program.

**Fiksdal:** Exactly.

**Preciso:** That's one that continues to be important to me because having students begin to be engaged with the study of history and seeing history as something that's so connected to other parts of the culture, and the ways that we have acted and engaged as a nation.

Because the first time Sarah and I were planning it, we thought there will be turning points in American history, so the first few times we taught it, we taught it thematically. The fall quarter was focused on wars of the 20th Century because The Age of Irony is the 20th Century. Sadly, it's a whole century of wars. We taught World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War in the fall.

In the winter, we taught the social movements that came out of that wartime experience and developed. We taught the Civil Rights Movement, second-wave feminism, the Progressive Movement. In the spring we taught the cultural artifacts that come from that experience—literature, film, art.

The first couple of times that we taught the program, we kept almost all the students fall and winter, which made spring's study super rich. But then, about maybe the fourth time, we thought, the

students are not staying in one program all year. That became less and less common over the years that I taught at Evergreen.

**Fiksdal:** And for fulltime, too.

**Preciso:** Yeah, so it made more sense for us to go chronologically. We kept those themes but changed the way we structured the curriculum.

But the wonder of year-long programs, for the students who stay, is they are doing really good scholarship by the time they are in their third quarter of a program. That's a privilege and an experience they would have nowhere else as an undergrad.

**Fiksdal:** I always felt the same that they were doing some graduate-level work.

**Preciso:** Yeah. Not all of them, but some of them really, absolutely. That's one, and then Work and the Human Condition. Stephen Beck and I—Steff now—taught together a number of times, and I learned so much from him. I remember the first time we taught it, we used Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*. That was the book that the students struggled and struggled and struggled with, but then they never forget it when they have to really stay with something that long. We used it all year. We kept going back and back.

I was reading one particular passage and I said, "Oh, gosh. I went over and over this one paragraph. It took me 15 minutes," and Stephen said, "Oh, you could spend two hours on it." That's the difference between a philosopher and a lit person, I guess.

**Fiksdal:** And it helps. It helps to know that you're both doing close reading.

**Preciso:** Yes.

**Fiksdal:** You have a lot of the same technique for entering at text.

**Preciso:** Right. But that was a wonderful program to teach in. It was really timely. We had a more difficult time keeping the students, or really filling the program to 50, because I think it's difficult, and it's philosophy, but it was very important to me and to Stephen. That's one of those programs where we were just chatting in the hallway. "That would be interesting to do."

I taught Culture Is History with Mark Harrison, which we're teaching as a two-quarter this time. I think this is our fourth round with that. The Art of Adaptation, also with Mark, we did three times.

Then he and I taught this program that we came up with called Forbidden Knowledge, because we thought, that's so fascinating for film and lit and drama, all of that. The first time we taught it, the students were absolutely engaged, and they were really on it, and they kept saying it was the best thing they'd ever done. We thought, this is one of the best things we've ever done, so we wanted to do it again. And we did.

It's the chemistry of the class.  The second time the students were not interested in the kinds of works that we were studying.  I don't know, it was just different.  [laughing]  It was very strange, and it was not as satisfying.

**Fiksdal:** Did he teach some work with plays, like actually reading or acting?

**Preciso:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.  We did that.  Mark always does that.  It's been really wacko trying to do it on Zoom.

**Fiksdal:** Well, yeah.

**Preciso:** Even in class this fall—we were in class every other Saturday, but with masks.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, so you can't really see expression.

**Preciso:** Yeah, it's challenging.  I think those are my repeat programs.  Oh, and Victorian studies in various forms, but not the same exact program, and taught with different people.

**Fiksdal:** That's really good.  That helps.  You talked a little bit about learning to teach using your own style, and I wanted to follow up a little bit on that.  What parts of the Evergreen philosophy really mattered for you in your teaching?  How did you develop that?  Has it changed over time?

**Preciso:** I learned from John McCann, and he was an Evergreen brat and stuff, but much more of a traditional lecturer, seminar, but not a lot of hands-on workshop kind of work.  Then teaching with Nancy and Jan I was so curious about and really impressed by what the students could do if you really gave them a task in a workshop and asked them to really zero in on a text, and really think about that, pull it apart, and work with each other, and then come back together and share what they'd come up with.

That engaged experiential teaching and learning was important. I think reading *Teaching with Your Mouth Shut* made a difference as well.  But over the years, I've thought, Don's [Finkel] book was amazing and really good.  And I never could actually do it.  I didn't teach with my mouth shut.  But part of it is I think *Teaching with Your Mouth Shut* privileges students who feel like they have the cultural capital and the intellectual ability to do that work on their own.  I think, for me, part of my job as the faculty is to shape the way the program works, and to shape the way a workshop would go.

**Fiksdal:** That's a good point.

**Preciso:** I've experimented over the years a few times with having the students facilitate seminar. Depending on the group, sometimes it worked.  But sometimes it was a disaster.

**Fiksdal:** I never had good luck.

**Preciso:** It's not fair to the students who had done their work.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah. Student facilitators don't know how to bring in other students who are quiet. They don't know how to move to another topic if it's not really working. There are a lot of things you have to help them with.

**Preciso:** That was never something that worked for me. The other thing that I think is powerful about an Evergreen education—it's an absolute privilege both to teach and for the students—is—and we've talked about this already a bit—a team-taught, year-long program. There are fewer and fewer over the last few years that do that.

**Fiksdal:** I didn't know anyone was still doing it.

**Preciso:** Yeah, Sarah and I, it's always been three quarters long. Stephen and I, too, and Mark and I. We've been privileged enough to be able to do that, but I think it's more challenging with our enrollment that's so low that . . . I don't know.

In some ways, I wish that the college itself would just double down on what we do really well and do it. Maybe be smaller, but still do that. Because I'm worried. I'm worried about trying to make Evergreen like other colleges.

**Fiksdal:** This was one of my questions for towards the end of the interview, but let's just hit it now. What advice do you have for those who continue on teaching? You're retired, and you'll teach a little more, but you've been there for a very long time, and you have a lot of perspective. What are some of the things that you are unhappy with about the way the college is going now?

**Preciso:** I am very concerned about the college not paying any attention to local, working, adult students. There's all the State workers that we could be making contact with. I get so frustrated with looking at the materials that go out.

You remember when we had really good mailers that went out about Evening and Weekend Studies all over Thurston County?

**Fiksdal:** Yes.

**Preciso:** Even up into Pierce County a little ways. They had our pictures, they had our classes, they had some articles about other students. Those worked.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Preciso:** Clicking on something online is not the same.

**Fiksdal:** There was much more context, and you could see everything, and how it was laid out over the year as well.

**Preciso:** Yeah. There's a reason that that worked. I'm just frustrated that the focus seems to be absolutely on recruiting high school-direct students. There's only so many of them, and there's fewer and fewer.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Preciso:** I don't think it's a good move. Sarah probably talked with you about this, too. But the focus for what they're calling the School of Professional Studies or whatever it is for adult students is now on certificates for their job, and I think, what on earth is that about? Because, at least from my perspective, what's important is that we can offer a rich liberal arts curriculum to working people. The college seems to not care about working people in where they're going to offer their rich liberal arts curriculum.

**Fiksdal:** There's no outreach coordinator anymore for Evening and Weekend Studies?

**Preciso:** There's very few classes that are, even remotely, scheduled in the evening and on the weekend. Very few.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, it's very odd.

**Preciso:** The whole point eventually, all the rhetoric is, "We're going to have this blend of people teaching halftime programs, and day and evening will mix up." There's not been one single fulltime faculty who's been willing to teach in Evening and Weekend.

**Fiksdal:** Habits are hard to change, and people don't like change.

**Preciso:** But lots of Evening and Weekend faculty would much prefer to teach in the daytime. They get a chance to do that, and they do.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, I see.

**Preciso:** It's really a different dynamic and, I think, challenging.

**Fiksdal:** Going back to these certificates, did the someone at the college do some research to find out which ones would be best?

**Preciso:** They came up with three. I'm sure you've been reading about them, too.

**Fiksdal:** No, I know nothing about them, but Sarah did tell me the names of them.

**Preciso:** Okay. One of them is organizational something. Another one is about sound, like being a sound technician. Another one is about being a veterinary assistant. And . . . you know . . . I just think even thinking about who those are pitched to, those are not jobs where you're going to make a decent living even.

**Fiksdal:** No.

**Preciso**: I just . . . I . . .

**Fiksdal:** It doesn't help State workers.

**Preciso:** All this money and time that's being focused on that could be focused on really, as I said, looking again at what we do best. I just . . .

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, it sounds like a rejection of the past for no good reason.

**Preciso:** I think it's desperation. I do. I think our enrollment is so low. One of my neighbors here in the condo is retired faculty—also still teaching on a post-retirement contract—from PLU. They're in the same boat. Liberal arts programs are not filling up, and I think that's really too bad.

**Fiksdal:** That's across the country. People want a professional degree of some sort, apparently, or they think they do.

**Preciso:** But the certificates are not even a degree. They're not credit-bearing.

**Fiksdal:** I see.

**Preciso:** The students have to pay for them, they can't use financial aid, and they get a certificate. I hope it works for some of them, but boy.

**Fiksdal:** How long does it take to get a certificate?

**Preciso:** I have no idea. And I don't know how much research that has been done on certificate programs, like at UW or other places; what actually works and . . . I don't know.

**Fiksdal:** Okay, that's good to know your perspective, and good to know a little more about the college as it is right now. I think that another really rich area for talking to you is about governance, because you did a lot of governance, and you did a lot of very helpful work for the college. I wonder if you could review some of those projects.

**Preciso:** I don't know how many times I was on the Agenda Committee, but that's always been interesting to me, and I like having a voice. It was important to have a voice from Evening and Weekend faculty perspective. Usually, it worked well, and I think it was important.

I've been on a number of Hiring Committees. One of the most challenging was a few years ago when there were going to be nine positions that were moving from long-time contingent faculty to regular faculty. Maybe there were six. I'd have to go look in my notes again.

**Fiksdal:** I remember that. It was a big jump.

**Preciso:** Therese Saliba asked me if I would chair the committee that did that, and I said I would. But it was super challenging because I knew all the applicants pretty well, and there weren't enough spots for all of them. But the committee worked hard and took it seriously, and it took a lot of time. But we did choose the best we could, and we got good people regular spots on the faculty. Like Steph, and like

Steve Blakeslee, and like Marla Elliot. People who we absolutely depended on to provide this rich liberal arts curriculum. But that was tough. It was really tough.

**Fiksdal:** How long ago was that? Maybe five years ago?

**Preciso:** Maybe, yeah.

There was another move to hire long-time visitors daytime, and then they opened that up to long-time halftime visitors. Both Marla and Stephen Beck applied, but neither of them got positions. It was hard.

**Fiksdal:** I remember that. That was a tough time. I went to all of those faculty presentations.

**Preciso:** I did, too.

**Fiksdal:** And I commented extensively. [laughter]

**Preciso:** I know. But that's important work, I think.

**Fiksdal:** Yes.

**Preciso:** As colleagues that we have to do. I've been on dean searches. I've been on provost searches. I hate to admit it but I was on the committee that chose Michael Zimmerman, who ended up not to be a very good provost.

**Fiksdal:** No. I had to go in as a dean one quarter to help out.

**Preciso:** I remember that.

**Fiksdal:** I took some opposing views in deans' meetings, and he actually yelled at me. Unbelievable. He was not for Evergreen.

**Preciso:** No, he was not for Evergreen, but he presented himself well when we interviewed him and all that. There was something off about him.

The other thing I think was a really important part of governance is to be always, always at your planning unit meetings. I always tried to be there.

**Fiksdal:** And others did not attend?

**Preciso:** Some would once in a while come. Even when I was doing double duty. When you were a dean, we went to our disciplinary planning unit meeting and to our Parttime Studies planning unit. I enjoyed both.

**Fiksdal:** But you took the time to do that.

**Preciso:** Yeah, some of us did. But it was important, I think, to be talking to or just be connected to our discipline. Eventually, I didn't do that anymore. It was just work.

**Fiksdal:** Right, but I think it was important in the early years because people needed to know their colleagues. You did a lot of governance, and got to know people, and you knew Evergreen from earlier teaching, but still . . .

So, you didn't move into fulltime ever again after that?

**Preciso:** I taught fulltime. Stephen and I taught Work and the Human Condition. Paul Prysbilowicz asked us to do it as a first-year program.

**Fiksdal:** I thought you did.

**Preciso:** I did Victorian studies as a fulltime. I think that's it. I think just twice. Or three times.

**Fiksdal:** Still, that shows your versatility—three times—to move from Evening and Weekend into fulltime.

**Preciso:** But also, I had the privilege of not needing to work fulltime. As you know, working halftime is basically a fulltime job, but I didn't need the financial support to do that.

**Fiksdal:** I started that policy that you could teach three-quarter times by offering another module.

**Preciso:** That was really useful for me.

**Fiksdal:** A lot of people, but I know that was hard. Tough situation.

**Preciso:** It's an equity issue, too. Right?

**Fiksdal:** Yes. What happened, from your point of view, when we got the union?

**Preciso:** I think part of it was really good. I think both the administration and the union members, especially in those first couple years and first couple negotiations, it was very fruitful, and I won't back off from that. I think it's important for faculty to have not just an advisory role, or a consulting role, but a legal place to stand on issues that matter to faculty.

But I think I've been a little bit disappointed. I haven't been that involved since I retired, obviously, but the outreach hasn't been robust, I don't think, to union members and to other faculty who are not union members, to become more engaged, and to be listening more carefully to what faculty are saying to them. But I think it was powerfully important that we get the union.

I think the other thing that was important was—I'd been a steward a few times, and reaching out to new faculty, both contingent and not—but I always focused on contingent faculty—just inviting them to coffee, and getting to know them, asking them about what mattered to them. That was useful, and, I think, important to do.

**Fiksdal:** It did really change the attitude towards the administration, though.

**Preciso:** And that's unfortunate, because at first—I remember Chuck Pailthorp, we had signed the contract, and there were faculty and union members and administrators—we all did a potluck in his

backyard. That was lovely. It was really nice and important. For a while, we had meetings where there would be admin and union stewards together, maybe 15 people. Those were really important. That's what I mean about the union not really communicating openly and respectfully with administrators.

**Fiksdal:** Right.

**Preciso:** Sarah was saying to me one time, when she was a dean, she really got to feel the tension between what you need to do as a responsible member of the administration, and what you might want the administration to do differently.

**Fiksdal:** Not only that, one dean had to almost fulltime work with the union. It took up a lot of time. There's a lot of work, so I think the deans became much more distanced from faculty. Who had time for faculty to drop in and you'd talk over their problems? Not many.

**Preciso:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** Although I always served that role when I came back into the deanery.

**Preciso:** Sarah did, too. She visited every single halftime program, particularly of contingent faculty. She would talk about how much she learned by watching people teach. I always thought it was too bad that we didn't set up a more robust system of inviting our colleagues to come and watch us do our work, but also for us to go and watch our colleagues do their work and talk to each other about that. Other places do that.

**Fiksdal:** We never did it in the fulltime either, except in the very early years when we had a Danforth grant, and Nancy Allen came in and observed a seminar I was teaching. Her comments were just revelatory. It changed my whole approach to seminar. I thought it was really useful.

First of all, there's the issue of time, and you're not paid for that for Evening and Weekend. There are issues like to consider. But, yeah, you're right, it is too bad. It's just teaching together that you learn.

**Preciso:** Yeah, and that is an incredible privilege. Right?

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, and it's unusual.

**Preciso:** I think that's probably why I've only had one quarter of teaching by myself.

**Fiksdal:** That's very interesting. I wonder if, thinking back, you had some particularly memorable students, or any that you keep in touch with now.

**Preciso:** Yes. One of my students—I haven't been in touch with her for a long time, and it's been almost 30 years now—from Paradigm of Progress that Nancy and Jan and I taught together. We got to know our students really well because there were three faculty and maybe 30 students. It was a small program, but we had potlucks at least a couple times a quarter with the students, and we really got to

know them. One young woman, Susan Duncan, she was so engaged, and so smart and funny, and a wonderful writer. We kept in touch for a while, and I sent her a wedding gift. But I don't know what she's doing now.

You know how students will turn up in more than one of your programs, which is problematic, but also kind of cool sometimes? One student, Adam Lawrence, kept in touch with me. He was in maybe three different programs over the years. He's up in Seattle, and we're Facebook friends. Facebook has been kind of interesting. I never would do it with a student that's my student now, of course.

**Fiksdal:** No.

**Preciso:** But once they're gone—

**Fiksdal:** It's useful. You can hear from people.

**Preciso:** One of my favs was Cilio Pacheco. He showed up in . . . what was the first program he took? . . . maybe Work and the Human Condition, but I'd have to look. He was probably mid-forties when he first started at Evergreen. Filipino-Hawaiian. Construction worker. Married and a dad and all these things.

He had no college, and he just got excited about things. I must have been teaching with Mark because we went to a play. He'd never been to a play, and he was so excited to do that. Then he brought his wife and went to see the play again.

Then he was in a program with Ann Storey and me, and students were doing creative projects. He was an incredible artist, which he hadn't talked about at all, and didn't see himself as that. I said, "Where did you [learn that]?" He said, "I used to be a tattoo artist in Hawaii." Well, there you go! [laughing] But he created some amazing things.

We went to the art museum. Mark and I always took the students to the art museum in Tacoma because it's such a lovely museum. He was just blown away by what he was seeing.

That's the other thing is adult students who have limited cultural experience—they don't feel like they belong in different places—he got so excited about the museum. Again, "I'm going to take my wife and we're going to go back." It used to be—it's not anymore—Evergreen students got into the Tacoma Art Museum for free with their ID card.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, wow.

**Preciso:** The college doesn't pay that anymore.

**Fiksdal:** But it's a nice museum. It's small so it's a good introduction.

**Preciso:** The new wings are just amazing. If you've not been to the wing that has artists about the American West—

**Fiksdal:** I saw that, yeah. It's true, I haven't been back for at least three years.

**Preciso:** There was an amazing exhibit that was traveling and was there for fall quarter, and Mark and I did a fieldtrip to inside. It was the Kinsey exhibit. It's this family that has the largest collection outside of the Smithsonian of pieces that have to do with African American experience. Letters and books and paintings and sculptures, and just a piece of it had been moving from traveling nationally. We brought the students to that. It was really good. We took them to the LeMay car museum as well.

**Fiksdal:** I've never been to the car museum.

**Preciso:** Oh, it's totally wacky and fun. But American culture, popular culture was our topic.

**Fiksdal:** Exactly.

**Preciso:** Each time we've taught Culture as History, we've gone on a fieldtrip to the car museum. I can't remember . . . oh, students who were memorable. There's been a few that I love to see on Facebook and figure out how they're doing. Some of them have done incredible work, gone on to do incredible work.

One of the students that Stephen and I had in Work and the Human Condition got super engaged reading about—we had a small class, so what we did was offer an extra four credits, so we structured in—Have you ever used Slack?

**Fiksdal:** No, I don't know about Slack.

**Preciso:** It's a platform where the students, in real time—it was José Gómez who started doing this kind of teaching on this platform; it's not a video thing, it's only text—they're typing. Jose developed this great protocol for how students would say, "I have something to say," and all that. It was really interesting.

Stephen and I used that protocol and the students, if they wanted to earn 12 credits instead of eight, needed to read *The Making of the English Working Class*, which is a big volume.

**Fiksdal:** Wait a minute. Who's that by?

**Preciso:** E. P. Thompson.

**Fiksdal**: I've read that.

**Preciso:** I bet. It's an amazing book.

**Fiksdal:** I was just thinking that sounds so familiar.

**Preciso:** It was 1958 or something.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, I read it because—

**Preciso:** He was one of the scholars who began really seriously looking at the history of regular people.

**Fiksdal:** He interviewed them.

**Preciso:** He did some, but mostly, he was looking all the way back to the 18th Century going forward. It's an amazing book.

This young woman got super engaged with that book and really interested in the working-class women in Britain in the 18th Century. She graduated from Evergreen, and she ended up going to graduate school in Britain and got a master's degree in 18th Century women's studies.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, my goodness.

**Preciso:** I know. Last time I talked to her, she was desperately trying to find a teaching job, but that's not a thing that's probably going to pop up in a community college for her.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Preciso:** But she's not sorry that she did it.

**Fiksdal:** No, it sounds fascinating.

**Preciso:** She's probably 40. It was just something she was interested in.

**Fiksdal:** She was probably reading rare books.

**Preciso:** Exactly. That's the other thing that matters to me is that we had the privilege and took responsibility for introducing students to how to use a library, for example.

**Fiksdal:** Yes.

**Preciso:** Every program I've taught, we've done library work. Hands on with all the stuff that's there, because their tendency, if course, is to just Google something and see what they can find online. I learned in graduate school how to do a really good, annotated bibliography, so over and over again, I've used that as the first step to a year-long project, where you pick a subject that you want to engage, then you research, the students write a real annotated bibliography, and in the final quarter, they write their paper.

**Fiksdal:** Did you teach them the research skills, or did you invite a librarian to help you do that?

**Preciso:** I would always invite the librarians, but I also taught them myself. Now, you can just hit this little thing and the whole citation pops up, but I made them learn how to do it using MLA. They should know how to do that. But I guess it's my Luddite scholarly self. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** That's okay. I taught them how to use notecards and stack them in various ways.

**Preciso:** I did, too, and bibliographic cards. Exactly!

**Fiksdal:** They just looked at me, and I said, "But this physicality when you're doing research actually can be useful."

**Preciso:** Yeah, and I would have them take their bib cards and move them around.

**Fiksdal:** Exactly.

**Preciso:** And also tell them, "Part of your bibliography can be a source that you found not really useful. You should say why." There was this one book that I don't know how many students used. It's called something like *Cooperative Communities in the Puget Sound*. It's good scholarship, so it's really good material, but the prose is just turgid. [laughing] It's horrible! I always used that as an example, "You'll find things that are useful, but you should tell your reader how useful it might be, because you're going to write a paragraph that needs to really describe."

**Fiksdal:** "Skim this one." [laughter]

**Preciso:** Right.

**Fiksdal:** "Use the index."

**Preciso:** Yeah. But also, we would bring the students to the Tacoma Public Library. Sarah and I always did because of the rare book room. When we were teaching World War I and the Progressive Era, there's all this real, hands-on material that the librarians there—because they know me because I go there all the time—would bring boxes of stuff up for the students. Posters from World War I, newspapers. Just the excitement of noodling around in actual artifacts and things is exciting for students.

One time, when I was teaching with John Baldridge, because Sarah a dean, we went to the Tacoma Public Library, had it all set up and everything. The archivist is just starting to talk with us, and all of a sudden, the fire alarm goes off, and everybody has to exit the library because one of the shelterless people got really mad. The librarian wanted her to leave because she was being disruptive, and she came back with lighter fluid.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, no.

**Preciso:** She didn't destroy anything, but she started a fire in the corner of the library. I had been laughing with the students earlier when they signed their form about the risks that might be entailed, I said, in going to the library. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** Were you able to get back in?

**Preciso:** We couldn't get back in the library, but our other part of the fieldtrip was the History Museum involving a former neighbor, Redmond. If you were going to create a character who is the exhibit's coordinator for a history museum, you'd create Redmond. He's my age, kind of portly, bow tie, suspenders, but generous with his knowledge. And every time I brought students to the History Museum, I would ask him if he could do his talk about how a history museum chooses and displays, and what are the consequences of those choices, and all that stuff. He would do it every single time. He's retired now, but he was good.

**Fiksdal:** But that notion of developing relationships outside Evergreen is really crucial to your teaching.

**Preciso:** I think so, too. At the Art Museum, at the History Museum, even at the car museum, I think that is important. When teaching with Ann, she was an art historian, and she had different kinds of connections in the community that were really important to our teaching.

**Fiksdal:** I think the topic for her master's degree was Hispanic or Latino artists.

**Preciso:** Yes. She would come when Sarah and I would be teaching about the farmworkers movement and talk about the political art, because the college owns a whole bunch. Randy Stilson used to bring a whole bunch of it to the classroom, or we would go to the little gallery that was downstairs.

**Fiksdal:** That brings up a topic I haven't asked about, which is visiting in different programs. Did that occur very much in Evening and Weekend Studies? I mean visiting, coming in to give a talk?

**Preciso:** Oh, yeah. As I got to know more people, then I had less hesitancy about asking people to come. Sure.

One of the most gratifying things of recent years happened when Mark and I were teaching Culture as History and Vauhn Foster-Grahler—she had come one other time to talk about math—we were talking with her, and she was so interested in our subject that she wanted to be part of our faculty team.

Our students got two credits of math each quarter. Vauhn read every single thing that we were reading. She was not getting any extra money for this. She read every single thing we were teaching, and she would come on Saturdays and do these great workshops with the students that were using math to connect to whatever history or what we were doing. In fact, she's coming in February to reprise one of the talks that she gave about math, science, and the Cold War, and how it changed the way math education was taught.

**Fiksdal:** Wow.

**Preciso:** Yeah, so she was wonderful.

**Fiksdal:** What a resource she is.

**Preciso:** She's amazing.

**Fiksdal:** I know she goes into programs a lot, but you allowed her this way of integrating.

**Preciso:** She told me she just loved it. And she'd come to our faculty seminar every week. She brought so much to it. She's just terrific, so I'm excited that she's going to be coming again.

Ann was art history. She would come anytime I asked, and I would go and talk with her programs as well.

Sam Schrager came a number of times. When Stephen and I were teaching Work and the Human Condition, one of the projects was interviewing somebody about their work, and it couldn't be their mom. [laughing] It had to preferably be somebody they didn't know well.

**Fiksdal:** This was when you taught fulltime, freshmen.

**Preciso:** No, it was Evening and Weekend. I think Sam came in the daytime, too. But he would come and talk about how you do an oral history. What are some of the things that are helpful and not? Examples from his work. He was terrific.

Lots of visitors. Sarah and I have visited back and forth. Joli and I have done that. I think that's really important.

**Fiksdal:** That's very rich. That helps understand a little bit how you can add richness to your program, and breadth.

**Preciso:** Also, students get to meet other faculty.

**Fiksdal:** Exactly.

**Preciso:** Because they're comfortable maybe in my program, but they really need to be taking math from Vauhn, or they need to be really thinking about creative writing with somebody who does that kind of writing.

The other thing—back to one of your earlier questions—that has been important for students is the ability to create an individual study contract with a faculty who's willing to support them, which I have done many, many times. I learned after the first couple times to only do this with students you know. That was my thing. I was halftime. I wasn't getting paid to do this. And a student is not going to be able to write a novel in 10 weeks, I'm sorry. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** I had a student who tried.

**Preciso:** That's gratifying work, too, when you find a student who is really engaged. Usually, it would be a student who was in a halftime program and needed to spend some time with children's literature because they needed that for MiT, or they needed some kind of support. But obviously, you can't support everybody.

I had a student who wanted me to be his faculty sponsor, and it was about horticulture or something. I said, "I'm sure that's interesting but I'm not the right person."

**Fiksdal:** They think they can do it on their own and all we do is sign off or something. Kind of crazy idea.

**Preciso:** Exactly.

**Fiksdal:** I want to circle back to why you moved from literature to history. We didn't really delve into the why.

**Preciso:** I think it's because I really realized that you can't understand literature outside of historical context. It really, really matters, the whole thing of Culture as History. The literature shapes the history and is shaped by it, so I think it's important for students to understand, and for me to keep delving into that, for all kinds of reasons, so that they can recognize historical references; that they understand, reading Dickens, that it's important that they know about Victorian history and culture. Same thing with $19^{th}$ Century American stuff. I think they're inseparable.

**Fiksdal:** I was interested in the question, too, because that's what I did in the French programs that I taught. First of all, we didn't have a historian in French literature, but I thought it was crucial. So, besides teaching literature, we added in history. I had to learn how to do it. I wasn't perfect at it, but it was great. It was great to bring that perspective and to have the students understand in a broader sense what was going on in that time.

**Preciso:** Sarah does what we call the "lens lecture." She does it every time we teach. What she's wanting the students to understand is that, of course, when you're thinking about any kind of history—let's say you're going to teach second-wave feminism, you're going to be learning about that—the different perspectives on it are the lens that you, as a scholar, bring to that, and they are different.

That's the difference between reading a textbook that has an overview idea of, say, American history, where things just happen, and an actual history of a certain thing. The scholar usually is pretty clear about their perspective and what lens they're going to have. The students have lenses as well as they're doing it.

I realized that at different times and in different contexts, my lens changes—on a piece of literature, or a piece of historical teaching that I want to do. It's different if I'm thinking about Work and the Human Condition than it is when I'm thinking about Forbidden Knowledge.

**Fiksdal:** That's a good point.

**Preciso:** That's the other thing that I think is so important about Evergreen is that, as faculty, we don't have to teach the same thing over and over and over again. If I were teaching $19^{th}$ Century American lit three times a week over and over, hopefully, I would find some way to keep it lively, but I think the autonomy that we have as faculty at Evergreen is pretty powerful and important.

**Fiksdal:** People who do that have time for research, they have time for hobbies, they have time for other kinds of things [laughter] than throwing their souls into Evergreen.

**Preciso:** That's true. You throw your life into a good program.

**Fiksdal:** Is that how you see your research is your programs?

**Preciso:** Yeah, I think so. I realized that a couple of times, starting projects and then didn't finish them because I got so busy doing something else. When I was going through all those years of stuff to put things into the Archives, I realized that it's the workshops, it's the syllabi, it's the five-year reflections. I took time with those. I liked doing them, actually. Some people hate it, but I found a really interesting way to write an essay about my thinking. I gave titles to them.

**Fiksdal:** Nice.

**Preciso:** In fact, as I was looking through, the last one that I wrote was in April 2017. After all that was happening at the college, I titled it "Driven to Distraction: A Retrospective Approach," because I think we were all driven to distraction.

**Fiksdal:** Talk about that a little bit. What happened in your life when we had all those issues?

**Preciso:** It was horrible, actually, for me, because a confrontation that Stephen and I had with Naima [Lowe], right in front of the library, got filmed and posted everywhere. We became the face of white fragility or something like that. It was awful. It was awful.

**Fiksdal:** How did it become a confrontation?

**Preciso:** This group of students came into the faculty meeting. Demanded that the meeting be stopped. "All of the faculty need to follow us, and we're going to occupy the administration offices." They'd already taken the deans out of a presentation before the faculty meeting. So, we are in this faculty meeting with these angry students and some angry faculty. They're just hurling accusations at people.

A bunch of faculty get up and follow the students. I did not. Naima was sitting across the lecture hall from me. She said, "Susan, how could you not blah blah blah? You are a historian. You should know." I went over to her, and I said, "This is like reverse McCarthyism, what's happening. This is not good." She was filming me. Yes.

Then it was Nancy Koppelman and Stephen Beck and a few other people. We were standing in the bottom of the lecture hall, and these students were saying, "You have to!" They were basically herding us over, and we did not go into the Library Building. She was screaming at us. It was awful.

Then both Stephen and I were deposed by an attorney, as was, I think, she. That's what happened. But it was very awful.

**Fiksdal:** I'm so sorry. She was filming it all the time?

**Preciso:** She was filming me in the faculty meeting, but that's not what went online. I don't know who posted the video. Somebody was filming with their phone.

**Fiksdal:** That little video—

**Preciso:** It went viral.

**Fiksdal:** It went viral. I never saw it, so I don't know anything about it, and I'm wondering what happened. You're all academics. You know how to present an argument. Did it go beyond that? It was emotional?

**Preciso:** We were trying to talk to each other. We were trying to talk. Naima was so angry I think she couldn't listen. We were upset enough that we would have been smart not to even engage at all, but it's hard to do that when someone's right in your face.

**Fiksdal:** Exactly. And she had confronted your earlier.

**Preciso:** Yeah. That whole thing was just awful, I think.

**Fiksdal:** She later resigned.

**Preciso:** But she got a big . . . I don't know . . . package. Right?

**Fiksdal:** Well, good, because she was harassed online, physically threatened.

**Preciso:** Oh, I know.

**Fiksdal:** It was horrible.

**Preciso:** Everything about it was awful. But I think, from my perspective—and part of this erupted because of this big conflict with Bret.

**Fiksdal:** Bret Weinstein.

**Preciso:** And from my perspective, both of them were not serving the students well. It became all about them, and it was awful. Because students of color absolutely had issues the college to address. Absolutely. Without doubt. I don't know. It was not good.

Stephen and I had graduating students that year. One of my students was an Army vet. She was returning to school after 15 years. Her parents were coming from the East Coast. She just started to cry, and she said, "They're not going to come now." It was awful.

**Fiksdal:** That was the year they moved the graduation to Tacoma.

**Preciso:** Cheney Stadium. Because the Proud Boys were going to attend. It was awful.

**Fiksdal:** So many threats.

**Preciso:** It was pretty terrible. Anyway, I don't want to end our interview on that.

**Fiksdal:** No, we're not going to end on that. Things might come back to your mind that you want to add in, but I wanted to talk now about retirement, what you're looking at. You're doing a PRC now—post-retirement contract. I heard from Sarah that it's only four credits. [laughing]

**Preciso:** I'm doing four credits in the fall and four credits in the winter, but basically, I'm halftime faculty because I like doing that teaching, and I didn't want to separate and just do eight credits.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, so you negotiated that. I see.

**Preciso:** I'm getting paid four and four. But I did it that way so that in the fall, because I'm half of a halftime faculty, I told Mark, "I'm going to Hawaii in October." [laughter] "And I'm not going on Zoom on the two Wednesdays that I'll be gone." I felt okay about that, and that was good. And we've got 11 students.

**Fiksdal:** I know that that's really small, but I know that that's true also in the fulltime curriculum, so that's just the way it is right now. So, do you plan to do more of these?

**Preciso:** I would like to. I hope I get the chance to do it. I think, given our enrollment, that's something that will have to be negotiated—because I purposely didn't take the buyout thing. You could retire and get a lump sum and not get a PRC, but I really wanted a PRC.

**Fiksdal:** What, beyond teaching, are you interested in, are you doing, or you want to pursue?

**Preciso:** Originally, I thought I wanted to volunteer at the historical society archives, which are right across the street.

**Fiksdal:** I see it. I saw it just then. What a beautiful building! [Susan had turned her laptop to see out the window.]

**Preciso:** That's the research center. I thought, it's across the street. I could volunteer there. But with Covid, they're not working there, but that would be very interesting to me. I would be interested in volunteering at the Art Museum because I learned a lot of art history from Ann, and I could teach myself some more.

**Fiksdal:** You could be a docent.

**Preciso:** I could be a docent. I would love to do that. I'm very active in an activist parish in Tacoma. Again, Covid. It's hard. For years, I've been on the Social Justice Commission for my parish. With Covid and Zoom and Zoom meetings, this year, I said, "I'm backing out." I can't do one more Zoom meeting a week. [laughing]

**Fiksdal:** No, it's really hard if you're already teaching on Zoom and your life is on Zoom. I joined the League of Women Voters in 2020.

**Preciso:** Good for you!

**Fiksdal:** On Zoom. [laughter] I didn't really start meeting people until this year, in little snippets. People were taller. You only see a face. [laughter] It's just the oddest thing.

**Preciso:** That's what I would like to be able to do going forward.

**Fiksdal:** It sounds terrific.

**Preciso:** And travel more. And again . . .

**Fiksdal:** . . . you can't travel.

**Preciso:** The first summer of Covid, and now last summer as well—we usually take our two youngest grandchildren—from the time they were small, we've been taking them on trips every summer, just us and the grandkids. No parents. They love it. We had planned this big trip to New York. We were going to go to the Baseball Hall of Fame first, because that's in Cooperstown, and then get down to the city, and do all these things. I had the plane tickets, I had the apartment rented, I had the whole thing.

We had to cancel. We couldn't do it last [year]. Now I'm trying to figure out—I think I'm going to try to schedule it.

**Fiksdal:** Summer is hard to plan. I keep thinking they're talking about the pandemic peaking, and this omicron peaking, in January, and then we're going to, I guess, be okay. But we've already faced two variants. There will be more variants.

**Preciso:** The only thing I can hope and pray—really pray—is that the variants become less and less virulent.

**Fiksdal:** Right, so we can risk traveling, or feel that we can.

**Preciso:** Yeah. But it was nice. We went to Hawaii, and Sarah and Mike were there at the same time. We had a great time.

**Fiksdal:** I saw that on Facebook.

**Preciso:** They went to Tahiti after that.

**Fiksdal:** Travel really is something you can suddenly do because you've got the time, and you start to realize you actually have enough money.

**Preciso:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** I'm looking at this to see if there's anything else that we didn't cover that we ought to. You talked a little bit about Michael Zimmerman. Did any other of the administrators impact you in any way?

**Preciso:** Michael didn't really impact me, except that I got frustrated with him, and we had the other provost that was invisible for a little while. I think the presidential search was a disaster. I am so grateful to John Carmichael and to Dexter Gordon for stepping into those positions because I think they can do a good job.

**Fiksdal:** It's the first time in quite a while we haven't had—except for Les Purce—but all our other presidents had academic backgrounds, so I was wondering how John was doing. I worked with him years ago when I was dean. He gradually worked his way up into VP, and now President.

**Preciso:** His PhD, I think, is in administration.

**Fiksdal:** It is.

**Preciso:** But Dexter is a really good scholar. I've been to, I think, all of the conferences that he's organized at UPS about teaching in diversity.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, so you've known him for some time?

**Preciso:** Not personally, because those are huge conferences. Big, national ones. Evergreen would pay for our attendance . . . the pedagogy? . . . it will come to me. But really, really good conferences with national scholars and all kinds of good workshops. Four days. So, I was really delighted. He was one of the people that applied to be President, and they passed him by.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Preciso:** We were just, "Really?"

**Fiksdal:** He didn't have administrative experience is what I heard. That was the reason.

**Preciso:** No, he was a provost at University of Puget Sound for year.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, then that doesn't make sense. Interesting. So, he's very interested in pedagogy. I didn't know that.

**Preciso:** Absolutely. And he's got this really fascinating background. He's from Jamaica, and he studied in the US, and then went back and finished a PhD when he was probably in his thirties or so. He has a law degree as well. He's just an interesting person. Fascinating. The reason he applied—because he's probably 65—he said the reason he applied to Evergreen is that he was just so interested in our pedagogical model.

**Fiksdal:** It sounds like, with all that connection, you need to talk to him about—

**Preciso:** I think so.

**Fiksdal:** That can be another project for you. [laughing]

**Preciso:** Right. John Carmichael asked Sarah if she could meet with Dexter because Dexter was interested in adult working students because he had been one.

**Fiksdal:** Exactly.

**Preciso:** As Sarah was, and as I was, and as you were for part of your time.

**Fiksdal:** And we all went to school later. We interrupted and then went later, so we were adult students.

**Preciso:** Yeah. Sarah said she had a really good meeting with him, so that was good.

**Fiksdal:** I'm glad to hear that. Is there anything else that you want to address that I didn't ask?

**Preciso:** I had one thing. I'm back to thinking what I miss, I guess, that we used to do, is real faculty retreats.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, we don't have faculty retreats?

**Preciso:** Well, we haven't.

**Fiksdal:** Oh.

**Preciso:** Well, we have. We've done a couple at the State Park, but almost nobody stays over. Sarah and Ruth and a few of us will spend the night, but we used to have really fun faculty retreats.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, and what we did in the evening mattered because you would mix socially.

**Preciso:** Right. That was good. And I think we could look at some of the things that worked well and seemed really generative and pull the best of those. Because I think even when this pandemic ever ends, and we can be together, we need to rebuild connections.

**Fiksdal:** Absolutely. I think that has been one of the issues that you hire so many faculty, and then don't have a way to get to know each other. No Summer Institutes. Very few, or not well done, retreats. Is anybody having a potluck anymore? And how do you know who to invite into your program if you don't know people?

**Preciso:** I know. I think it's going to be big work.

**Fiksdal:** We've already outlined what you're going to talk to Dexter about. [laughter]

**Preciso:** There you go! You might have been retired already but we had this big faculty discussion over a number of faculty meetings. I think Sarah Pedersen was Faculty Chair when we did this. It was about where we should put our focus and our resources. There were various things, like supporting Evening and Weekend Studies, but one that I was really interested in, because I was getting close to retirement, was having retired faculty be resource faculty and able to connect with the college that way. That just hasn't happened.

**Fiksdal:** There are a few people who got that designation. I don't know whether they still do it.

**Preciso:** Right. I think Joye [Hardiman] did a few times, but a place for us to really connect with each other, on campus, and maybe help out.

**Fiksdal:** I also think it's true that you and I have talked about this quite a bit. You put up the Facebook retired staff and faculty group, and that hasn't done much because it's Facebook, and it's hard. It's proven not to be the best way to do that.

The thing that I really regret is that nobody has asked us for some of our ideas or opinions or help. Not even to mentor. Not even to mentor students when that's something we know how to do. I've brought it up.

When I was a dean, I suggested that we bring back deans to talk to them about all the difficulties of deaning at Evergreen. It was so hard, and we were having trouble. We were having trouble actually

connecting together, too. I remember that Richard Alexander came. Other people came, but I really remember what he said.

He said, "This is the way it is. You're herding cats, and that's impossible. It's got to be a liberal arts curriculum. You've got to convince people that that's what they're doing and show them that the curriculum is or isn't that year. Then you've got all this other support you have to do. That's just the nature of the problem is paradoxical." I just thought, wow! That just really helped. [laughter]

**Preciso:** Yeah, but how stressful it is, I've seen up close. Sarah had a bleeding ulcer and almost died from it while she was deaning.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, I didn't know that.

**Preciso:** She works out all the time. She gets up at 5:00 in the morning. She got up. She went into the bathroom to get ready to go to work out. She said, "All of a sudden, I just fainted." She was vomiting blood. Luckily, Mike heard something and came in and called an ambulance. She was in the hospital for four days. She's good now, but the point is, stress.

**Fiksdal:** It's true. She didn't bring that up.

**Preciso:** Maybe I shouldn't have, since we're recording.

**Fiksdal:** No, it's good to bring it up. Some faculty have talked about a leave of absence, being so stressed out and having both mental health issues and physical issues. I think that's something that the college has never been able to really address, the workload. And when you are responsible, you just try to plow through.

**Preciso:** That's right.

**Fiksdal:** We don't have substitutes who can come in. And also, we don't think there is anyone that could come in.

**Preciso:** Who could possibly fill my place? [laughter]

**Fiksdal:** That's it, because there are people that could come in. Yes, things would not be the same, but they could be there, and they can do seminars.

**Preciso:** If we can be flexible enough to switch from—we were supposed to have in-person class on Saturday, and now we can't. If we are flexible enough to try to make remote teaching—which is an anathema to what most of us do, and want to do—then we could be way more creative about how we think about the workload, how we think about accessing resources—retired faculty and staff.

**Fiksdal:** Maybe you and I can work on a proposal and see if we can—

**Preciso:** Okay.

**Fiksdal:** And not just us, but other people. Maybe we could make a little presentation. We have a new administration. They might be open, whereas other administrations weren't.

**Preciso:** Yeah, I think that's a good idea.

**Fiksdal:** Maybe go to the top instead of messing around with the deans. [laughter]

**Preciso:** Oh, gosh. Yeah, right.

**Fiksdal:** We're nearing the end of our time, so what I would like to suggest is that we stop. If you think of something more, we will come back together. I was just thinking that maybe it might be useful for me to tell Sarah that, too, in case the two of you want to talk a little bit more about anything that has come up.

**Fiksdal:** Thank you, Susan. This has been a really dynamic conversation.

**Preciso:** Thank you. It's been nice to chat with you.

**Fiksdal:** It's just always good to chat and see you.