

Peter Kardas
Interviewed by Anthony Zaragoza
The Evergreen State College oral history project
September 20, 2020
FINAL

Zaragoza: Welcome, Peter Kardas.

Kardas: Thank you, Anthony.

Zaragoza: . . . to this Evergreen oral history project interview. [Today is September 20, 2020.] I want to start—maybe you can talk to us a little bit about your early life, especially the more formative events in your background.

Kardas: I was born in 1949 in London, England. My dad had been a Polish airman who had come to England in 1940 with the Polish Air Force. My mother was English. They got married in 1941 and immigrated to the U.S. in 1951. I'd been born in '49, so I was two and a half years old when they immigrated.

We moved to Lake Charles, Louisiana, because my mother had a sister there who had married an American G.I. during the war, and my parents wanted to get out of England, at least my dad did. The Louisiana relations were the folks they knew in the U.S. who would sponsor them. They had to have a sponsor because my dad was Polish, and it was extremely difficult to get an immigration visa if you were from Eastern Europe in the 1940s. They had to find a sponsor, so my aunt and her family were the sponsors.

Moving to Lake Charles, they were extremely poor when they moved over. They had to put everything they could into a couple of trunks and put them on the ship. They were part of the whole immigrant poverty story. But they were moving into an extremely segregated place and an extremely racist place. So, despite the poverty, there were privileges that came to us as a white, European family that weren't available to 40 percent of the population who lived in Lake Charles.

The guy that my aunt married was an electrical contractor whose family had come from an old lumber and ranching family in Louisiana. My dad was able to get a job as a union electrician working for his brother-in-law. That was the way he made a living for the rest of his work life, as a union electrician, both in Louisiana and then in California. My mother became a legal secretary.

You don't necessarily know all of this when you're growing up, but there was this whole thing about family struggles to survive, both as individual people and as a group. There were also intercultural

struggles between my dad and my mom, and those things you don't necessarily know are going on until way later. Those were definitely there. Then there was the whole culture of Lake Charles, and Louisiana, and the racial realities that were true in Lake Charles.

And then we became sort of like Okies, moving to California in 1964 with a U-Haul trailer attached to the back of the car, partly because my mother hated Louisiana from the first moment she set foot in it, but also because there were way better work opportunities for my dad. So, all that stuff about wealth and income and race and privilege and unionization and so on were all pretty important, I would say, for where I took my life after that point.

Zaragoza: Are you essentially a baby when you come to Louisiana?

Kardas: Two and a half, yes.

Zaragoza: How old are you when you all head out to California?

Kardas: Fifteen.

Zaragoza: So, you spent a significant time there in Lake Charles.

Kardas: Yeah.

Zaragoza: Anything stand out to you that is important to you from that early period in Louisiana?

Kardas: There was Jim Crow. Everything was totally segregated, so there were no black kids in any of my schools that I went to in Lake Charles. The city buses were segregated, the bus stations were segregated, and so on.

There's just a whole bunch about Louisiana, when you're a kid and you're growing up—I was barefoot and shirtless all summer long. I was like a Huck Finn kind of character, running around the neighborhood, a working-class neighborhood in Lake Charles. It was very much a white, working-class, Southern existence.

At the same time, my dad—whatever his prejudices may have been —was pretty aghast about the whole apartheid system in Louisiana, so we grew up with values which said all that is wrong, but at the same time, working to change that reality was not a part of my life at that point. Since I left when I was 15, there's been a lot of life since that time that have affected me, but there is some amount of that that I'm still rooted in, as it were.

The other thing is that it is true—it's true for the Midwest, too—there's a kind of friendliness among people in the South—of course, almost all the people I interacted with were white—which is different from what you'd find in the Northeast or even, to some extent, on the West Coast. Now, if I run into black folks, for instance, who are from Louisiana, we can have a conversation as two friendly people from Louisiana talking with each other, because there are certain things that are common

experiences that cross racial lines. So, there's a culture there. Some of it is a racist culture, some of it goes beyond a racist culture.

Zaragoza: I imagine food and fishing.

Kardas: Yeah, food and fishing, although my dad didn't fish and he didn't hunt, which made me an outcast in Louisiana. But for instance, every Friday we would eat fish at school. They would serve fish on the cafeteria menu, and that's because in Louisiana—southern Louisiana in particular—it's a heavily Catholic area because of the French and Cajun presence there. The fish-eating was true in the black schools as well as the white schools, as it turns out. I didn't know that at the time. Barbara Laners and I once had a conversation about that.

Zaragoza: Yeah, and I have interviewed Barbara for this project for sure.

Kardas: Oh, okay. She and I have talked a little bit about that.

Zaragoza: Then you moved to California. Now you're in high school. You're starting to move toward college. What are some of your interests at this point?

Kardas: Uh . . . my interests? [laughing] This is a huge culture shock, going from Lake Charles and ending up in Walnut Creek, California, which is a suburb in the Bay Area. My dad had heard from another union electrician that Walnut Creek was a good town to live in, and there were a lot of jobs in Contra Costa County and Walnut Creek, so that's where we ended up. We didn't know anything about the town when we got there.

It's an upper-middle-class bedroom community in the Bay Area. I find myself around a lot of rich kids who were well into the California culture and all that. I was pretty lost in high school in the two years of high school in Walnut Creek. Basically, I was just trying to meet people and get my feet on the ground and figure out how to survive.

But it was also an exciting and beautiful place to be, so as a kid, when I finally did make friends, in the summer we'd go to Santa Cruz a lot, or wherever. I was just doing kid things at that time. Aside from rudimentary things about what's right and wrong and so on, no real political consciousness or political involvement in the time I was in high school.

Zaragoza: Track for us your education trajectory after high school.

Kardas: I was in Walnut Creek. The closest four-year college I could attend was Berkeley. I had good grades from both Louisiana and California in school, so I applied into the UC system and made Berkeley my first choice in terms of where I wanted to go. I was accepted to Berkeley and started there in 1966.

Zaragoza: I was going to say, this is a hot time.

Kardas: This is a pretty hot time. That's two years after the Free Speech Movement, which was '64. I show up a pretty scared kid not having had a particularly progressive education from the public schools I was in in Lake Charles or Walnut Creek. I spent a year or so just figuring out if I was going to make it as a student at Berkeley, let alone what I was going to do with my life.

But it was a hot time politically, and I'd figured that I was going to do something with political science when I went to college since it was part of my family DNA. My dad and I argued politics all the time. Politics was extremely important to him. He'd come from Poland and was a Polish nationalist, but also a kind of socialist, and communism was a big problem for him, and struggles of people to have a national identity and so on. I was raised in a family that had a lot of political—what would you say?—political issues that were on the table, even though I wasn't a particularly politically active person before I got to college.

So, I figured I was going to go into political science, and those were the courses I started taking, along with some other classes when I got there. But where I really started to find myself as a student and when I started to really do some thinking was in political theory courses. It happened to be that political theorists at Berkeley and their graduate students were very interesting people who had connections with the Free Speech Movement.

I would say after my sophomore year, that's really where my head was at—academically, in terms of political theory, but then also doing a lot of organizing on campus and with people off campus. That was when I finally figured out—well, I didn't figure it out, but that's where I set off on my current trajectory. That really started right at about that point.

Zaragoza: Where do you go from there, Peter?

Kardas: You mean where do I go intellectually or where do I go in my life?

Zaragoza: Both.

Kardas: Okay. One of the interesting grad students at Berkeley, who I got to know really well during my time there, was Larry Spence, whose academic career took him to Penn State. While I was still at Berkeley, Larry introduced me to a guy named Burt Alpert, who was a social worker in San Francisco and one of the organizers of an independent union, the Social Services Employees Union. I got to know Burt really well, and Burt was also an intellectual who was writing books, pamphlets, and things of that sort.

My last two years at Berkeley was a combination of thinking of things in terms of political theory, but also being connected to Burt and Larry, who were focused on union organizing, and particularly focusing on organizing on the job and what's involved in that—the nitty gritty of that kind of organizing, and also its philosophy.

After I graduated from Berkeley, I spent a year hanging around Berkeley and drifting a lot during that time. I said to myself, well, I don't know what I'm going to do, so I might as well go to grad school. I applied to Penn State and ended up in the political science program there. That's where Spence had gone, so that's where I ended up doing my master's and PhD.

Zaragoza: Was that in the '70s that you're doing that?

Kardas: It was a long period in grad school. I started there in '71, stayed in Pennsylvania until '78. Lin Nelson and I moved to Ithaca in '78 because she got a job at Ithaca College. I went along and finished my dissertation while I was in Ithaca, and then I got a job teaching—on a temporary basis at first—at Ithaca College, and then in a tenured track. I was there for five years.

Zaragoza: Where did you and Lin meet, Peter? Do you want to talk about that at all?

Kardas: We met at Penn State. She was a grad student in sociology. I had a friend who was in the Political Science Department who was her roommate at Penn State, and so we met through her. We met in '73. We got married in '74. Some of the people that she was studying with in the Sociology Department were people I also ended up studying with as well.

Zaragoza: Then you go on to Ithaca. Do you want to give us some highlights from that period in your life?

Kardas: There are a couple of things. I taught for five years at Ithaca College, taught a whole bunch of courses just because I had to as a fill-in. Then I got into a theory position. We were teaching 16 credits a quarter, four classes a quarter, which was an incredibly intense thing to have to learn how to do.

I would say that having to teach basically every day, and then all the hours of interaction with students, was important both for the discipline of doing that work, but also for the learning that goes on when you're teaching.

At the same time as I was doing that, I was active with the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, which was a big thing in the early 1980s. That was the focus of my organizing at the time. In particular, I focused on economic conversion, the conversion of things from military to commercial or civilian use. When I left Ithaca College in '84, a position opened up with the American Friends Service Committee in Syracuse that dealt with economic conversion, and I applied for and got that job.

When I was teaching, I never liked to lecture. It's not something I get any kind of pleasure out of, standing in front of a class and performing and having to command attention for a 50-minute period of time. I much prefer a dialogic or Socratic teaching style. Learning how to do that with classes day in and day out, where you have a certain content that you want to make sure students are getting, and at the same time, you want to engage with students where they're at and in terms of how they're reacting

to the content, I think that kind of dialogic teaching method was really important for everything I did from that point forward. That's really how I taught as a graduate student as well when I was a TA, but I did a lot more of it at Ithaca College.

If I were to be invited in to do a guest presentation in a class now, that's the way I would like to interact with the students in terms of dialogue. That was a huge part of how we tried to teach when I was at the Labor Center.

Zaragoza: While you're at Ithaca, you finish your dissertation. Do you want to talk about the dissertation work, your topic, some of the things that you discovered in doing that work?

Kardas: I finished the dissertation just before I started teaching at Ithaca College. It was a dissertation on the politics of worker self-management. But it was in the context of political theory, so it was a look at how certain political theorists address the question of power and political change at the workplace. It also focused on organization theory and how worker self-management was being experimented with in Yugoslavia and the Scandinavian countries particularly.

The theorists that I looked at were Sheldon Wolin, who had been one of my instructors at Berkeley; Hannah Arendt; John Dewey; André Gorz; Karl Popper; and the anarchist school of political philosophy. I did my best to make it a scholarly piece and a piece in political theory, but it was also a defense of the richness of the anarchist tradition and what it would offer on these particular issues.

That laid the foundation for some of my work down the road when I was working on worker co-ops and employee ownership, which I did more in Washington State than in New York State.

Zaragoza: Does this work on your dissertation come with you to your work with the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Syracuse? How do you conceive of that next step?

Kardas: It wasn't the FOR, it was the American Friends Service Committee. Close enough. The way I was looking at the economic conversation question was in terms of how you can engage people who are working either in defense plants, or research outfits that are connected to defense, or on military bases, or wherever, so that they can become part of a movement away from a militarized society to a peaceful society.

It goes back to the question of what can people on the job do in order to make significant changes, both where they're at and in terms of the broader society, which was the question that Burt Alpert had introduced me to when I was at Berkeley in the late '60s and early '70s.

That's what I tried to do when I was with the American Friends Service Committee. I helped to form this little group, we called it the Syracuse Technologists for Change, which was primarily a few

engineers from Syracuse University, and a couple of other folks with an engineering mindset who were interested in military and peace issues.

We were trying to engage, for instance, with people who worked at a military research center in Rome, New York, that was doing classified stuff for the military. We tried to engage the engineers there on that. Also, tried to engage labor unions on these kinds of issues.

That was where I really wanted the emphasis of that work to go, but it was extremely slow and difficult. I didn't want to do things that primarily involved protesting at military bases—although we did some of that—or lobbying legislators, but actually trying to engage with the people who are doing the work.

That was what I was learning when I was at Berkeley, that's what I was learning from Burt. It's also part of what was in my dissertation in terms of transformation of workplaces from the bottom up, and therefore transformations of the economy from the bottom up. I would say that the combination of theory and practice was in my dissertation, was what I was learning at Berkeley, and was part of what I was trying to do with the AFSC.

Zaragoza: What are some key successes or lessons from this Syracuse period?

Kardas: This was a time when there was a lot of attention in the peace movement and on the left with the whole idea of economic conversation. The Machinists union had put out papers about the importance of conversation. Seymour Melman was an engineer at Columbia University who had written about how important economic conversion was, not only because of militarization, but also because of the impact on the whole economy. There was still a Soviet Union, there were still extreme tensions between the Soviet Union and the U.S., and I think that there was a sense that eventually, we're going to get to the point where this military industrial complex is going to have to come down, or at least be significantly reduced, and there's going to need to be a movement to transform our industries to non-military purposes.

That was kind of in the air, as it were, and I would say that since that time—you know where the military budget is now. It's approaching a trillion dollars a year, I think. That whole sense of we've got an economy here that can be converted to uses other than military is just not around the way it was then.

I guess the bigger lesson for me is when you've got people who are working inside of a research outfit that's doing military stuff, or working for a defense contractor, it's just a huge amount to ask them to take that system on. As much as the bottom-up stuff is important—it's important to me—you're not going to get very far with that kind of organizing.

If you've got a lot of other things going on, where, let's say, magically we had a Biden administration and a series of Democratic administrations, where they really started to significantly cut the defense budget, you're going to have people all over the country who are going to howl "My gawd! That's the only work we've got in our community. What are we going to do with these military plants?" Then you might have, because there's a change in the national priorities, an opening for doing organizing with people at the bottom.

But I would say, in general, it isn't worth beating your head against a system that's going to be extremely difficult to have successes in. Whatever magical moment you might have, or whatever conversations or moments you might have, you've got to get some handle on what the bigger picture is and not stay ideologically committed to a particular approach because that was something you learned when you were 20 years old and you don't want to let go of it.

And in fact, when I was in the AFSC, I started to move my project over to a program on broader economic democracy with a particular focus on worker co-ops. There were a whole lot of lessons I learned from that—particularly after moving to Washington State—that are somewhat similar to the economic conversation work.

The economic conversion project was a tough organizing challenge. [laughing] But AFSC was a great place to work. That's the other thing I learned—the Quaker method, or one of the Quaker methods, of conducting meetings. When we would have our meetings of the AFSC area committee, the meeting would open with some moments of silence. It was supposed to be a meeting of business within a context of worship—I forget the term that they used for that. The idea was you really need to listen, you really need to not just get into arguments with people, you really need to be thoughtful, and you really need to respect each other. There was a lot to be learned from that Quaker approach.

Zaragoza: At what point do you all head to Washington State, and what kind of work do you do when you get out here?

Kardas: I'd started this worker co-op focus when I was at the AFSC in Syracuse, and then in '91, we moved to Olympia for me to take a job with the Washington State Department of Community Development, which at the time had a program on worker ownership.

Lin is from the East Coast—she's from Connecticut—and I was from the West Coast. I'd been wanting to get back to the West Coast because all of my family was out here and my parents were getting older, I had siblings out here, and so on. I had no other family because all the rest of my dad's family was in Poland and my mom's family was in England. I felt family obligations to try to be closer to

where my folks were. This job opened in Washington State. My parents were living in Washington State and two of my sisters were living here.

This job was in a program of the State Department of Community Development that had a one-person staff before I came out. Then they got some project money—grant money—to hire an additional person, so I became that additional person in the state.

Three weeks after we moved out here, I was told by my boss that, well, there's another one of these Washington State periodic budget crises and the program may get cut because the agencies are having to make a list of programs they would cut if the overall budget cuts in the state reach a certain level. I turned to Lin and I said, "It looks like you might have to find a job." Lin was thinking that this was going to be a transition time for her. She'd be flexible, have lots of time to explore things that she wanted to do. But she started to make inquiries at Evergreen about teaching there.

So, we originally came out for me to do the job at Community Development, and that job on employee ownership I did for three years until '94. Then I worked on another project in Community Development that had grown out of an economic conversion movement in Washington State, so I went back into stuff that was related to conversion. I finally did a few months on some regular community development/finance stuff that I couldn't stand, and so left the agency in '98.

What was your question?

Zaragoza: It was, what brought you out here and what were some of the things that you did when you got here?

Kardas: My job in the employee ownership program was called a business succession project. Part of the theory and part of the idea of employee ownership was that a good way to build worker-owned companies or employee-owned companies would be to buy them out from owners who wanted to retire and had no one to leave their company to. A lot of kids don't want to go on in their parents' business. It's often hard to sell a business to some stranger, so maybe we could convince some of these retiring owners to sell to their employees, probably primarily through an ESOP, Employee Stock Ownership Plan, rather than a co-op, but we would try to push more democratic forms of ownership as part of the buy-out.

What I did with that project is I formed an alliance with some folks—not an alliance, but I contracted with some folks from down in Oregon – Pat Frishkoff in particular -- who focused on family succession planning. We went around the state doing workshops for business owners. Pat would do the piece on regular family succession—how to plan for that and so on—and I would do a piece on employee ownership and how that could be an option. Then, if anyone was interested after our

presentations, I would follow up with those companies and provide consultation with them about how to do conversions to employee ownership. That was pretty much what I was doing for those first three years.

I learned a lot. I did not come into the work from a business point of view. Before doing that job, I'd been an academic, and then I'd been a peace movement organizer, and a community-based organizer. I had to learn how businesses operate and what business finance was and what community development finance was.

I did classes on business finance and whatnot. I learned a lot about all that, and how you plan for successful businesses, which was a whole different kind of mental discipline than what I'd learned as a teacher or what I'd learn in grad school or what I'd learned at the AFSC, but I think, in the long run, was very useful for me.

Zaragoza: What's next?

Kardas: When I was working at the Department of Community Development, a merger was planned between that department and the Department of Trade and Economic Development. It became CTED, Community Trade and Economic Development. In that merger, you had employees in Community Development who were doing the same work as people at Trade and Economic Development, but the Trade staff were getting way more money than the Community Development people were.

This was something that a lot of people at Community Development were really pissed off about and had been for years, and they were getting agitated. "We really ought to do something about this," they said. Finally, I said, "Okay, let's get some people together to talk about doing union organizing here in DCD," because there was no union at the time.

We started that process probably in '93 or early '94. I became one of the lead organizers of the union organizing drive, and one of the lead spokespersons for the drive. Even though my dad had been a union member and I'd been a union supporter my whole life, that was really the first organizing effort that I had helped spearhead as an employee, as a worker. We were successful in the drive, and the Community Development staff in my job class formed a bargaining unit, which became part of the Washington Federation of State Employees.

I learned a lot about doing union organizing, both what you do as a rank-and-file worker—which is how I defined myself, a rank-and-file employee in the agency—and also how you work with union officials in terms of an organizing effort.

This was just when e-mail was coming into existence. I did a few what I would call e-mail epistles, messages I would put out on the e-mail system that had to do with our organizing or whatever,

so I was learning to use the new systems of communication for union organizing. That was a big deal, or seemed so at the time.

That union organizing—what I learned there, and then the program work I'd done in the '90s in connection with the Washington State Labor Council—became important in terms of the work I eventually did at the Labor Center at Evergreen.

The conversion job that I moved into after the employee ownership job at DCD, which became CTED at that point, was focused on rebuilding the shipbuilding industry in Washington State. It had been a huge industry at one time—there's still some of it left—but it had once been a big, unionized industry. We formed an organization that included union folks, but also companies that did shipbuilding and ship repair, and focused on unionized companies because that's where the best wages had been, plus I wanted to support unionized shipbuilding.

We built a network, ShipNet. This was another one of those difficult challenges, not as hard as economic conversion was in Syracuse because there actually were companies here that would have liked to have their manufacturing increase and so on. But the whole thrust of shipbuilding manufacturing worldwide was away from the U.S. It was going to Korea and China and other countries. It was another one of those futile organizing efforts. But again, I learned a lot, just as I had in Syracuse, even though it didn't make much of a difference in terms of the manufacturing world I was trying to impact.

Meanwhile, we continued our union organizing at CTED. I was chief shop steward for the union and helped out several people who had grievances that I helped to resolve. I learned about the shop steward business, at least a piece of it, from doing that work there.

Zaragoza: It seems to me that the key thing is that you were able to successfully found a union.

Kardas: Certainly, for many staff at DCD, that was the most important thing. For me, too, it was invaluable that I could do bottom-up leadership and challenge management in public meetings and survive and not get fired. And I had the support of people in the workplace, including some of the more conservative staff who did business finance in the agency. I had people standing behind me, and I got some sense of what it means to take a risk while having backing from fellow workers. I think that was really important.

Zaragoza: It seems like this is what launches you into your work at the Labor Center at Evergreen.

Kardas: Right. I applied as director of the Labor Center in 2000. But I took a couple of years off from regular employment between the time I was at CTED and the time I started at the Labor Center. I worked as a consultant or adjunct staff person, if you will, to the faculty union at Bates Technical College

in Tacoma. I was doing maybe 15 hours a week of work keeping track of their finances, writing memos, helping to organize their meetings, that kind of stuff. I learned, again. That's another piece of the union world.

I was about 50 then, thinking about what kind of work I could do. I'd resisted over the years wanting to become the director of anything. I could have tried to become a supervisor at DCD, or I could have tried to move up the AFSC hierarchy. I never wanted to do those things. But now, I'm getting to be 50. Maybe I could be of use to people if I got an administrative position. I could let other people knock their heads against the organizing wall, while I administratively supported them. That would be of use to movement work.

The director position opened up at Evergreen at the Labor Center, so I applied for it and started there in August of 2000. There were very interesting folks there— Lucilene Lira Whitesell and Dennis Otterstetter were both part-time labor educators. They were two very different people who brought very different experiences to the Labor Center, and people from whom I learned a lot. Plus, Sue Hurst was an excellent administrative assistant.

I thought, okay, this is great. I'm going to nurture this program along, be of service to these folks. They'll do the nitty-gritty work on the ground, and I'll do whatever it is an administrator does.

But within six months of getting there, Barbara Smith, who was the Provost at the time, in another one of these budget-cutting situations, said, "Okay, they're saying our college budget might be cut. They're saying we may need to make cuts to the public service centers. If we decide to do that, I don't want to nibble away at each of the public service center budgets. I'm going to eliminate one program, leave everybody else's programs intact, and the program we're going to eliminate is the Labor Center."

Zaragoza: Oh, my gawd!

Kardas: This was within six months of my starting the job. I said, "How come? Why do you want to eliminate the Labor Center?" She said something like, "That's just the tradition here. Whenever we've wanted to go after one of the public service centers, it's been the Labor Center that's been at the top of our list." I said, okay, my holiday as an administrator is over. I had to step into an organizing mode, and think like an organizer about how we were going to save the Labor Center.

During the spring of 2001 and during the next year or so, we did several very public things. We produced a large banner for the Labor Center that we hung in the library lobby, that area down in the lobby where there used to be rallies and speakers and such. I think the lobby area is still there. We hung the banner there. We produced fliers that we handed out at events. Ralph Nader came to campus

to speak, and a couple thousand people showed up for that. We had a flier for everybody about how the administration wanted to cut the Labor Center. I confronted Les Purce and Barbara Smith in meetings of the whole staff and faculty. I wanted to make public what they were doing.

So I had gone into an organizing mode on campus. Also, the Labor Center's survival depended upon its relations with labor unions around the state, and also with legislators who were sympathetic to labor unions and listened to labor unions. So we said, okay, let's go to the unions and the Legislature and try to build up our budget over time.

That became my strategic goal as the Labor Center Director during the next several years. Not only, how do we save the Labor Center, but how do we build up its budget. How do we strengthen it with unions and legislators, so the college would no longer say during a budget crisis, we've got to throw the Labor Center out. That began that process.

Zaragoza: The culmination of your experiences results in you saving Evergreen's Labor Center?

Kardas: Yeah. Barbara Smith didn't have to make the cuts that she thought the college might have to make. The state agencies often go through this kind of an exercise where the Governor will say, "It looks like we may have a cut of 10 percent or whatever. Every agency has to plan for 10 percent worth of cuts, including colleges."

This happened at Community Development all the time and at CTED and so on. They put people through these exercises of saying, "If this cut happens, where will you make the cuts at the college, or the agency?" As it turned out, the cuts that Barbara Smith was threatening were not required, so therefore, the Labor Center probably wouldn't have been cut.

It wasn't as if you could say that my organizing actually saved the Labor Center at that point. Rather, I think what we did over years was make ourselves stronger in the eyes of people on campus, in the Legislature, and also in unions, so if budget cuts were required they wouldn't sacrifice the Labor Center in order to save something else. In fact, when big budget cuts did happen in 2009, the Labor Center was required to take a budget cut, but it wasn't larger than of the other public service center budget cuts, except maybe in comparison to the Longhouse, which was in a different situation. Yes, I would say that all that experience helped to—you could say "save" the Labor Center, or at least put it in a better position to deal with threats to its existence.

Zaragoza: I see. Tell us a little bit about the day-to-day operations of the Labor Center beyond the crisis management situation that you're thrust into very early. How do you operate once you recover from that? What are some of the things you do?

Kardas: There were some staple things that had gone on in the Labor Center for years that basically we continued after I was there. One of them was a summer school for union women, which had been offered many times before I got there, and that we continued. That's a several-days event that we would organize in the summer at Evergreen where 50 or so women from different unions around the state would come together for a residential learning and mutual support session. That was one of the things we continued.

We also helped to sponsor conferences from time to time. One, for example, we did in collaboration with some folks in Tacoma, including Mike Honey from UW-Tacoma. It was called From Chaos to Community, a title taken from Martin Luther King, Jr. We sponsored another gathering in Tacoma (at Evergreen's campus) on immigrant workers, and one in Olympia, with the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association, on unions and ports.

Then there were particular sessions we would do for individual unions—strategic planning workshops, or shop steward training workshops, or workshops on organizing or collective bargaining, and so on.

Dennis Otterstetter got us connected to the Laborers' Training School in Kingston, where we did a number of classes over the years on labor history. We would weave into those class discussions on union organizing. Those were week-long, 40-hour classes, that Dennis and I would teach together.

We started a program in Spokane that involved doing that Laborers' kind of school for multiple unions, not just for one union. We'd try to offer that at least once a year, or at least every other year.

Then there were other things, like the work Lucilene did in support of the Immokalee workers in Florida, for example. She organized on-campus presentations about their struggle. Or what Nina Triffleman initiated in regard to other kinds of farm worker solidarity. Lucilene, who was originally from Brazil, also did solidarity work with the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil. She brought that kind of international perspective into our work.

We would also go to people's classes as guest speakers. We had a large library of films and books that people on campus used. Sarah Ryan and one of her teaching partners and their students produced an early version of a workers' rights manual in one of their classes in the early 2000s that we then further developed, cleaned up and put out in both English and Spanish editions. Nina Triffleman did a lot of the writing and editing on that. That's now available on-line from the Labor Center at its new location on the Georgetown campus of South Seattle Community College.

I was also doing work with the Jefferson Center for Education and Research, which was based in Oregon, on contingent workers, particularly workers in the floral greens industry and other parts of non-timber harvesting.

We would try to weave a bunch of different kinds of work together. Some of it would have a beginning and an end date, some wouldn't, but that was the kind of weaving we tried to continue over time.

Zaragoza: You were also quite supportive of speakers that would come in that were speaking to issues that were relevant to the Labor Center. The Labor Center helped support various speakers that I brought in, for example, who were community and labor organizers. I just want to personally thank you for that.

Kardas: Thanks for the thanks, and for reminding me about that. To the extent that we could, we tried to be of service to the faculty on campus in terms of the programs you all were teaching. We had a budget, not a huge budget, but we would make money from some of the work we did with unions. We used some of that budget money to help sponsor speakers, or buy films or books, etc.

Zaragoza: What were some of the other campaigns and projects that you worked on at the Labor Center at Evergreen?

Kardas: Campaigns and projects as in . . . ?

Zaragoza: Over the time that you were there, you had these trainings that happened, you had education, you're a public service center in terms of training and educating workers—especially organized workers—from around the state and from around the region. But it seemed to me you also had projects at Evergreen, and campaigns at Evergreen. I'm just curious about some of those.

Kardas: You're thinking of campaigns, for instance, regarding the pay of exempt staff? That kind of an issue?

Zaragoza: Yeah. Were you working to develop some kind of association among workers?

Kardas: Here was the dilemma for me. As I was the Director of the Labor Center, I was actually part of management, so I could not be part of any bargaining unit that would be organized on campus, nor could I be directly involved in organizing any kind of bargaining unit.

But, in 2004-2005, Dennis Otterstetter decided to leave the Labor Center. We had made him fulltime—I'd made him fulltime—in part to try to keep him at the Labor Center. However, he was an extremely skilled carpenter and all-around worker who could make more money doing carpentry than he could working at the Labor Center.

I went to Walter Niemiec, who handled finances for the Academic Division, and said, “Walter, we’ve got to get the salaries up for Labor Center staff because we don’t want to lose Dennis and don’t want to lose other staff.” Walter said, “I’m not going to raise the salaries for particular people, in particular at the public service centers, unless we deal with the whole systemic problem of salaries for people in the Academic Division.” I said, “Okay, let’s take a look at that. How can we raise the salaries in a fair way for exempt staff who work in the Academic Division?”

We – a small group of exempt staff, who called ourselves Exempt Workers of Evergreen Together Organizing Ourselves, or EWE TOO -- knew people in other divisions were getting raises on an ad hoc basis, but Walter wasn’t willing to do it on an ad hoc basis in the Academic Division. It turned out that from 2001 to 2004, there was supposed to have been a freeze on salaries for all exempt staff in the college in order to deal with budget cuts, so it provided a great opportunity to go back and look at those years and see if, in fact, everyone had been frozen throughout the college, or, in fact, some people had gotten raises and other people hadn’t.

We got data for every exempt staff position throughout the college for those years, and then we looked at who had gotten raises and who hadn’t during that time. Lo and behold, for most people in the Academic Division, they had not gotten raises, so Walter had been pretty much true to his word in terms of not making ad hoc raises. That wasn’t true with the Business Finance Division and that wasn’t true of the President’s Division. The other division is the . . .

Zaragoza: Facilities?

Kardas: No, Facilities is in the Business Finance Division. It’s one like where Student Aid and so forth is.

Zaragoza: Student Affairs.

Kardas: Yeah, that. They had also been hurting really bad, but they had had some raises. We put all this information together and produced charts and tables and sent it out to the whole community.

People could see then that there was all this arbitrariness that had gone on between the divisions.

That got Les Purce’s attention, so he put into place a committee to look at this and fix it. Within a couple of years after putting those charts out, they did some fix on the salaries for exempt staff, so the salaries for the Labor educators went up and so on.

Meanwhile, Dennis had left. Our efforts didn’t keep Dennis there, but I’m told they gave other exempt staff the idea that it might be a good idea to do some union organizing, because clearly, organizing can make a difference with these kinds of issues. Other Labor Center staff who joined us after 2007 were able to be part of that organizing effort because they weren’t in management. I think they helped out with some of that as well.

I didn't directly do any union organizing. What I had done was take the lead on this other work to show where injustices were in terms of who was getting raises and who wasn't. I guess that was the big piece of organizing I was doing until the audit happened. I was doing organizing as a manager, which some people think is kind of an odd thing, but it was what I was doing.

Another thing to keep in mind with all this is Evergreen's Social Contract. There's a piece of the Social Contract that says the college needs to protect free speech for everyone on campus, particularly those who were trying to do the most difficult kinds of speech, and who were putting themselves most at risk through their speech. I forget exactly how the phrasing is, but basically, it's "free speech matters, everybody here has a voice, nobody should be punished for speaking up, and that's what we really value as a college." This language mattered for other public positions I took through e-mail epistles that had to do with free speech among non-faculty employees in relation to academic freedom, or the right of the faculty to organize, or why management shouldn't be using typical anti-union techniques when it's dealing with the faculty union, things of that sort.

When the faculty were organizing, again, I wasn't involved in that organizing. Lin was involved in it as a faculty member. I had no direct part in the organizing, but there was this moment when the college put out exactly the same kind of statements about why unions weren't needed at Evergreen that the management at St. Peter's Hospital had put out about why unions weren't needed among certain employees of the hospital. It's a standard statement in anti-union campaigns, which is "We have a different way of doing things at Evergreen or wherever, and we don't need to have this kind of hostility between unions and management. We don't need a third party here."

So, I put out a statement that said something like, "Hey you guys are sounding just like any other anti-union management anywhere in the country." I think that helped. It was a little bit of assistance to the union organizing struggle the faculty were doing, but really the faculty—you all—were doing that work yourselves. I wasn't doing that organizing.

I would say by that point, we were starting to get into it a bit with management. I was trying to use the Evergreen culture and Evergreen principles about free speech and equality to try to make it more possible for people to speak out on things, or to assist in that effort. That put us, the Labor Center, up against the administration, both in terms of the union stuff, and also in terms of salaries.

When you're dealing with exempt employees, it's an interesting thing. You think of an exempt employee as being kind of a privileged person. They tend to make more money. They have some status within the hierarchy at an institution and so on. But they're also some of the most afraid people in terms of speaking up because their jobs very much depend upon what their superior thinks about their

work and their performance, and they don't really have a collective means of defending themselves because each position is different.

Zaragoza: Essentially, an at-will position.

Kardas: Yes, it's an at-will position. In fact, I think somewhere along the way we got into the whole question of at-will employment among exempt staff and tried to get the administration to address that question. The folks that were in Facilities or other union jobs had the ability to deal with that through their union contracts, but exempt staff didn't.

So, whatever could be done to create a little bit more space for people to speak up was kind of what I was thinking.

Zaragoza: What were some of the other anti-union tactics that Evergreen management deployed?

Kardas: In the end, they didn't use a lot. Plus, it wasn't only management that was opposed to the union. There were faculty as well who said, "We have an Evergreen way of doing things. We have the faculty meetings. We have an agenda committee. That's always how we've dealt with our issues here. We can go to meet directly with Walter. We can meet with Les, the President." And there were some faculty, of course, who were just anti-union no matter what.

The administration's position was "Yeah, that's right. There are Evergreen ways of doing things and we don't need a faculty union in order to address them." But they didn't push it all that hard. I think my memory is not going to serve me well on all the details, and I can't remember if they hired a union-busting law firm or not.

Zaragoza: I thought that that was the case, yeah.

Kardas: They might have, yeah. I'd have to dig through—yeah, you could be right.

Zaragoza: How did you go about getting the information that you were able to get on salaries and arbitrary raises?

Kardas: It was basically a public records request to the college to send us (EWE TOO) a database—a spreadsheet—with all of the salaries from those different years. Then we just took the salaries and put them in year by year, by position. We did the manual work of translating the information—the data—we got from them into a different spreadsheet. Then we saw where the increases were. Because salaries for public employees are public records, so they gave me all those years of data for all positions.

Zaragoza: How long did it take to get it?

Kardas: To get it from them?

Zaragoza: Yeah.

Kardas: I don't remember exactly. I'm thinking maybe a couple of months. It wasn't a huge amount of time. The data input and all that stuff took a period of several months. I think between the time we first put in the request and the time we came out with our report might have been six months. Something like that.

Zaragoza: Were there some interesting findings, surprises, or important information that you found in that process that's worth detailing?

Kardas: Labor Educators hadn't had raises, and in the Student Affairs Division, a lot of people were paid really badly, like people who were working as direct student counselors and so on. The pay was really low there. The Business Finance people took care of their own, as did the President's Division. But in terms of remembering a particular line or something of that sort, I'd have to go back and look at the tables. It was more the big picture that I was focused on.

Zaragoza: How long after this does the audit of the Labor Center happen?

Kardas: It was 2005-2006 that the salary analysis was going on. Then the request from the Landmark Foundation to audit the Labor Center came in May or June of 2008. Landmark said the Labor Center was breaking the law by providing assistance to off-campus organizations that were not connected to the college; that basically, by our very work, we were breaking state law. That was the basic charge of the Landmark Foundation.

I went to the provost, Don Bantz, and said "Look, this is totally ridiculous. The Labor Center has been around since the late '80s. There are two provisions of the law that the Landmark Foundation refers to. One is that you're not supposed to use public resources to support private organizations or individuals outside of your agency or your institution. The second part is it's okay to do that if that's what your program is all about."

Everybody knew the purpose of the Labor Center, which was to do education with labor unions and help them get stronger and grow. I went to Bantz and said, "Look, if you want to do an audit of our finances or whether we're depositing money properly—whatever kinds of things you audit with any other program on campus—fine. We don't have any problem with that. But you should not do an audit—really a political audit—on our basic functions because that's nonsense."

We had the State Labor Council go to the State Auditor—Brian Sonntag at the time—and he said, "As far as I'm concerned, Evergreen doesn't have to do this audit. It's totally up to Evergreen whether it wants to do it or not."

But as far as I know, it was either Les or Bantz or the two of them who decided, but Les says, "No, we're going to go forward with the whole audit the way in which the Landmark Foundation has

called for.” That process starts in May or June 2008. By November, I had to go back East for some heart surgery and was out for three months, and the audit was completed in January 2009.

Zaragoza: Peter, can we talk a little bit about your thoughts on Evergreen’s leadership to go forward with Landmark’s request? How do you understand Evergreen’s management’s reasoning and the decision that they made?

Kardas: Well, there was this is big, national, conservative organization, Landmark, that’s attacking the Labor Center, a piece of the college. The college could have stood up to the organization and said, “You’re not going to audit us. This is ridiculous. We know the Labor Center is legitimate by state law. We’re not going to do that piece of the audit.”

Instead of doing that, the college administration instead complied with the request, which I took to be a statement that we as a college have to do whatever we can to show the conservative forces in the state and around the country that we’re all above board here; there’s nothing funny going on at Evergreen regarding any of our programs or any of our finances.

During this whole period, there was this whole effort that was being made to . . . what should we call it? . . . rationalize Evergreen’s processes and bureaucracy and make them less irregular.

Zaragoza: Standardize? Really?

Kardas: Standardize. Exactly. To standardize things, and this mirrored an accusation—like other accusations that had made against the college—that things were irregular at Evergreen; that here was Evergreen supporting this Labor Center, and the Labor Center shouldn’t even exist because of state law.

I was told that everybody has to go through audits. Every program in the college is going to go through audits. This just happens to be your turn, and it’s just kind of happenstance that it was requested by the Landmark Foundation. The administration was trying to make it seem that this is just business as usual to have to do this kind of audit.

For me, it was like “Okay, you guys host the Labor Center here. You’ve hosted it now for 20-something years. You ought to be doing what you can to defend the Labor Center against political attacks from the outside. It’s not going to take much for you to do that. All you’ve got to say is that the Labor Center is not violating the law by existing and that’s the end of it.”

But instead, they say, “No, we’re going to give the Landmark Foundation what they want, which is an audit of the Labor Center.” Part of the case I tried to make to the college over the next couple of years as this whole thing went on was, “It doesn’t matter in the end whether the college administration rejects the auditor’s findings as false or whatever. What matters is that you put people through hell for a period of time.”

What they ended up doing was give the Landmark Foundation pages and pages and pages of alleged violations of state law. That was nonsense. It was just nonsense. My point of view is that it was a failure of leadership to not defend part of the college that had been around for quite a while. From their point of view, it was them using their authority to show everybody that the college plays by standard and bureaucratic rules.

It's important to remember that Les had been the first Director of the Executive Ethics Board, I think it's called. That's where complaints are taken if a state employee is accused of being unethical. Say a faculty member is accused of siphoning off funds from some pot of money in Tacoma over a 10-year period of time. Someone could take that accusation to the Executive Ethics Board to have them investigate it as an ethical violation.

Les had been the first Director of that Board, so I think he had a kind of a mindset about doing things by the book, creating an appearance of propriety. I think that was his way of dealing with conservative forces, which was to show them that he could manage things according to strict bureaucratic processes.

I didn't read it as the college wanting to kill the Labor Center, or that we were getting payback for the work we'd done on exempt salaries, or that I was getting payback for my criticisms of the college stance on union organizing, or things of that sort. Whether that was part of it or not, I have not heard anything to that effect. I took it as more an example of other kinds of things we've seen happening on campus regarding this kind of standardization of procedures.

I thought it was a horrible choice, but they made a decision to go forward with it.

Zaragoza: It seems exemplary of the defensive posture that Evergreen is often put into. In some ways, the failure of that defensive posture—because it ends up sending a particular kind of message to those forces that want to continue to do those kinds of things—it becomes a kind of green light that Evergreen is willing to operate on the terrain of those forces and accept their kind of frameworks and assumptions.

Kardas: It absolutely did. It totally legitimized what the Landmark Foundation had done because, as I said, the college had the option—as the State Auditor told them—he said, “You have the option. You don't have to do this audit. That's totally up to you as a college. Nobody's making you do this audit.”

They could have very easily, on the basis of a statute on the books, just stopped the process immediately, or any time they wanted to. But, yes, they legitimated the Landmark Foundation's request. They said, “We'll play ball with you.”

It is this funny thing about Evergreen that people have noted over the years that on the one hand, it's an alternative educational institution that goes back to the student movements of the '60s and

has a kind of hippie reputation. At the same time, it's very compliant in the face of certain forces in the state partly because people have been trying to kill the college from the very beginning. So part of the college's historic strategy has been to do a rope-a-dope and let themselves get pounded to some extent, but in the end survive and keep on going. Instead of being forceful and standing up and saying, "No, that's not who we are. We're not going to play along with you."

Zaragoza: Because in some ways, it's not long after that that a major change happens with respect to the Labor Center. The Labor Center is no longer at Evergreen. Can you tell us that story?

Kardas: The audit happens. It starts in 2008 and the auditor's report comes out in early 2009. When the report comes out, I put out a statement to the college and to the larger world—whoever wanted to listen to it—that said, "The college really blew it here. This report is full of all these mistakes. This is an outrage."

I hear through the grapevine that Les is telling union leaders around the state that I'm dead politically at that point. That's in 2009. It happens that 2009, as you know, corresponds with the first legislative year after the Great Recession hits, which was 2008, and now the college is facing huge budget cutbacks. The Labor Center is in crisis mode with the college administration because of the audit.

So, the college goes—through Don Bantz—to the Academic Division and says, "Okay, we really do have to make cuts now. Here's a whole list of choices of where you can make cuts, and here's what I recommend. For virtually all of the public service centers, I recommend a 50 percent cut in the state budget." That was going to be true for the Labor Center, it was going true for the Washington Center, and so on.

You've got to go back to the year 2000 when Barbara Smith said she was going to cut the Labor Center's budget. I'd been working for years to try to get the Labor Center budget up, and we had succeeded. In 2007, we were able to hire two fulltime labor educators at a new, higher salary rate because we'd gotten a boost in funding. Are you still there?

Zaragoza: Yes, sorry. We had someone come in.

Kardas: The Labor Center had gotten a boost in its budget so that we could hire two new staff people, Juan Jose Bocanegra and Sarah Laslett. It was like we'd finally started to get some life in the form of more staff resources in the Labor Center. Before the Great Recession hit, we were looking to build the Labor Center's budget up even more, and then this 50 percent budget reduction was announced. This was really just demoralizing to me after going through the audit.

The thing about the Labor Center is there had been no labor education and research center anywhere in Washington State before Dan Leahy and other folks created the center in the late '80s. Evergreen had hosted it since that time. But there had always been a sense that Evergreen really wasn't the right place in the state for a Labor Center. The college is off in the boonies. The Washington State Federation of State Employees is big in Olympia, but no other local unions are really big here. The major union activity is farther up the I-5 corridor in Seattle and Tacoma. And labor centers around the country that seem to be really thriving, like at UCLA, have made strong connections with unions that were community-based and where there was activity going on in connection with the communities they were part of. So, there's always been a sense that it's kind of a historical accident that the Labor Center was at Evergreen, and maybe it really should be somewhere else. That was what a lot of people had thought.

So we have this crisis because of the audit, and then there's a crisis because of the budget cuts, so I went to labor folks around the state—including Jeff Johnson at the Washington State Labor Council and other people—and said, "Maybe we could move the Labor Center. Maybe this is the time to do that."

Partly I wanted to do that because of those reasons I had just given, and partly it was because I went to Bantz and other people and asked, "You're telling us that the Labor Center will have a 50 percent budget cut now. Is there any guarantee that the budget is not going to be further reduced down the road?" Bantz said, "No, there's no guarantee. Nothing's off the table from here on in."

So we had a 50 percent current budget cut we had to deal with. We were looking at the possibility of further budget cuts down the road. It looked to me like we might be headed back to that position that they're going to say, "Okay, now it is time to cut the Labor Center because we don't have any choice."

I said, "In order to save the Labor Center, and maybe put it in a position where it can be more responsive to certain unions and certain community groups, maybe this is the time to move it." We got agreement from the State Labor Council, we got agreement from union folks who were on our advisory committee, and we began the process of figuring out how to do that.

The initiative really came from me, and it came partly because of the cuts we had taken, but also because of the cuts that I thought we might take further down the road. Of course, this is at a time when Evergreen's enrollment was at its peak, which was close to 4,500. It's now about half of that, or less than half, right?

The Washington Center's budget has remained cut, and perhaps been cut further. The Evergreen's K-12 center is gone. The Northwest Indian Applied Research Center is gone. The Labor Center is gone. There's only just the Longhouse and a little bit of the Washington Center left there, and the Center for Community-based Learning and Education, which always had the smallest budget and was always underfunded from the get-go.

I think the prognosis that things did not look good for the Labor Center was accurate, particularly as you now look at what's happened with the budget cuts and the decline in Evergreen's enrollment. Because there was a crisis going on between us and the college, that crisis provided an opportunity to explore this possibility.

I think they wanted to fire me for wanting to move the Labor Center. From what Bantz said in one of the articles in the *Cooper Point Journal* about the Labor Center, he thought I could have been, and maybe should have been, fired for insubordination for even taking this issue up with anybody outside the college. Not that they cared particularly about the Labor Center, not that they'd never threatened to get rid of it before. But they may have been worried that the move was going to piss off unions. And that would maybe hurt some of their base of union support, and would send a message out that maybe things aren't good at Evergreen. They were concerned about it from the public relations point of view, not because they really wanted to keep the Labor Center's mission and programs there.

A lot of people have misunderstood the Labor Center move. They thought, Kardas is pissed because of the audit, so he's moving the Labor Center. Or, the administration wants to get rid of the Labor Center so that's why this happened. But it really came from my initiative, and my initiative wasn't because of the audit. In terms of the struggle around the audit on campus, we won the audit battle. We had a unanimous vote from the faculty to support the Labor Center in early 2010, and we had support from the national AAUP, which issued a statement condemning the audit.

If it had just been the audit, I would have really wanted to keep the Labor Center at Evergreen, but once the budget was cut 50 percent after all the years of building it up and strengthening it, plus looking at the possibility of further cuts down the road, I just thought, okay, something's got to be done if we're going to save the Labor Center. I thought moving it was that thing.

Zaragoza: Maybe let's finish, Peter, with you just talking about the transition of the Labor Center to its new home.

Kardas: The Legislature authorized the move of the Labor Center to the South Seattle Community College at its Georgetown campus. Evergreen had agreed to transfer all the funding that we were getting at that time to South Seattle Community College.

All that was scheduled to happen on July 1, 2010. I assumed—because of what happens when these kinds of things happen in other agencies around the state—that I would transfer over as the Director of the Labor Center, and whoever I wanted to keep as staff would transfer with me. But the guy who was the President of South Seattle Community College, Gary Oertli, said, “Nope, you and everyone else have to reapply for your jobs.” The State Labor Council and we had to agree that that was going to be a condition for moving the Labor Center.

Zaragoza: Was that condition out of the ordinary?

Kardas: I think it was. Based upon what I knew from other agencies, I thought it was out of the ordinary. Oertli claimed that that’s just how we do things at South Seattle, but how many times had that college had a transfer like that?

Oertli met me—I think it was early January 2010—at the Labor Council offices in Olympia. I don’t think he liked what he saw. I don’t think he liked what he heard. I doubt that he liked what he heard from Les. I’m sure he talked to Les about who I’d been at the college and what I’d done at Evergreen. So, I think he decided not to do the ordinary and transfer us all over.

I was not happy about that. Meanwhile, as we were getting ready to move, I put out some public statements that were very critical of what the administration was doing at South Seattle. They were originally going to put us as a subordinate program within some sort of a business assistance program at South Seattle, and I said, “C’mon! After all that we’ve been through, and given what we’re all about, you’re going to make us subordinate to a business assistance program?” Again, with Jeff’s help at the State Labor Council, we got them to change that and made us equal to that business assistance center.

But it didn’t make me any more popular with South Seattle’s President. I did apply for the job. I also encouraged Sarah Laslett—who was still working with me at the Labor Center as a labor educator—to also apply for the job because I wasn’t sure I was going to get it. And, as it turned out, I was pretty burned out, and that showed in my interview.

In the interview, they asked me some question like “Can you talk about how you think the program is going to fit into South Seattle?” And I basically said, “You know, no college president or no college administration is going to want to have a Labor Center at its institution. Our job is to help strengthen labor unions and build up their power, including labor unions on campus. That’s not something you’re going to want to have at the college.”

I couldn’t help it. I was so deeply pissed off by the whole process that I couldn’t handle the interview. It’s probably also the case I was affected by my daily commute. We moved the Labor Center

on July 1 to the Georgetown campus, and I was commuting every day, back and forth, from that point until my last day on the job, which was October 31. That was pretty exhausting.

And there was a whole different kind of administration at the college, and it turns out they were a lot more petty in terms of bureaucratic things than Evergreen was. It was a whole different culture, and I just had no energy for it. After my interview, I just called the Provost or Dean or whoever at South Seattle and said, "I'm withdrawing my name as a candidate." Then Sarah became the Director.

It wasn't where I thought things were going to end up, but really, I think I couldn't have done it for very long.

Zaragoza: Any sense of how the Labor Center is there now?

Kardas: Sarah was there for five years, I think, as the Director, and then she left. They then hired another person as Director who lasted maybe a year and a half or two years. I think they were really floundering after Sarah. They continued with the same base budget we transferred over from Evergreen, though for a few years the Labor Council put in some significant funds to boost the budget. But while Sarah was there, they never built the core budget back up, though have done so through the legislature since she moved on..

Now they have a relatively new director, Adair Dammann, who used to be with SEIU and other organizations. They've got the additional funds from the State Legislature. They've got a guy, David West, who's doing some good stuff as their Research Director. I think they've got one other labor educator working there at the moment. It does seem to be difficult to hang onto labor educators.

They continue to have a lot of support from the State Labor Council. Over the years, and when Sarah was there, the State Labor Council always went to bat for maintaining their budget and for trying to increase it. As I said, they even put \$200,000-\$300,000 of their own money, or got affiliates to put in money, to hire additional labor educators. Jeff Johnson was really committed to labor education.

But they're still struggling. They still exist, but they're still struggling. [laughing]

Zaragoza: Peter, any final words on your Evergreen experience that you want to leave us with?

Kardas: One of the things I really valued at Evergreen was that I was part of a community there. Even though I was in a very different place from the faculty and many other staff, nevertheless, when I was involved in my messaging on campus or working with faculty to set up programs, I felt like this was a community that I was part of and could communicate with and got respect from. It was a reciprocal kind of a relationship there.

Having that community was really valuable and really important. I've always thought—even when Lin was there back in the '90s, before I started at the Labor Center – that there are some amazing

things that go on in the way of teaching at Evergreen and faculty who do great work. I thought it was a place where even a sort-of stranger, like a Labor Center director, could find a home. I valued that.

I think the move to South Seattle was the right thing, but it was not an easy thing to go through. For all those who were my comrades —not only faculty members, but staff—during that time, I really appreciated the solidarity we had in terms of the work that we did together.

Zaragoza: Wonderful. Peter Kardas, I want to thank you for spending this time with us for Evergreen's oral history. Thank you very much.

Kardas: Thank you, Anthony. Thanks very much for asking me to do this. I'm glad to contribute.

Zaragoza: It's an important set of stories and I thank you.