

Richard Alexander
Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal
The Evergreen State College oral history project
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FINAL

Begin Part 1 of 3 of Richard Alexander on 12-7-16

Fiksdal: Okay. I'm with Richard Alexander for his first interview in the oral history project. So, Richard, how would you like to begin?

Alexander: I would like to begin with a question that you asked me first on the telephone; that is to say, how I came to Evergreen. And that will inevitably slide into the next things that I think people—that I have to tell . . .

Fiksdal: Yes.

Alexander: . . . that would be of use, and we can branch off from that as we go. Okay. I was teaching at the time at San Jose State—it's now San Jose State University, but at the time, it was just San Jose State College—in an experimental program for freshmen and sophomores called Tutorials in . . . Arts & Sciences? I don't think so. But it was the Tutorials program, and this program had been set up by a man named Mervyn Cadwallader.

He hired me to teach in this. I didn't know much of anything about the program, I really didn't. But he got in touch with me because he—this gets lengthy . . .

Fiksdal: No, it's good, it's good to know.

Alexander: Okay. He had been in contact with a very old friend of mine, Jack Pickering, who had been pretty much my boss when I worked for Rinehart and Company, then middle-rank but fairly prestigious publishing house in the College Division. I won't go through all the difficulties of how I managed to get that job, but Jack was an editor, textbook editor, of enormous prestige within that quite specialized field. And he and I hit it off very well, and became quite close friends, although there was a big age gap between us.

Subsequently, while I was working for Rinehart, Rinehart was bought by Henry Holt. And even though Jack was a major editor, the new management really didn't want to absorb Rinehart. And so I was let go, rather ignominiously. It was kind of scandalous, because I'd done very good work for them. I was a textbook salesman.

Being a textbook salesman has a lot to do with my being at Evergreen and what I did, because, as a textbook salesman—you know my college training was in English literature. I had to sell textbooks in history, political science, mathematics, chemistry, physics, you name it.

Fiksdal: So you have to be able to talk a little bit about them.

Alexander: So I had to talk intelligently with the people that I went around selling them.

Fiksdal: Right. And they were, again, college-level textbooks?

Alexander: Oh, absolutely.

Fiksdal: Yeah, wow.

Alexander: So I was going—I had seven states in the Southeast, that is to say, everything from Virginia south, and west to Arkansas, but not Louisiana. The fellow who had New Orleans in his territory didn't want to give it up, wasn't going to give it up.

Fiksdal: He wasn't about to, no [laugh].

Alexander: So I went to all of these places. I had a very short time, but that's beside the point. What's really important is that I had to learn quite a lot about the current status on various important questions in those fields, so I could tell people with at least some authority that the textbook we had would work for them, or probably wouldn't work for them.

Fiksdal: Right.

Alexander: In fact, one of the things that made me peculiar—and I think led to success—is that I was willing to say, "Well, for the purposes of the course that you would want, this book might be very good on its own, but it's not appropriate to what you're doing. It just won't address those questions, but this other one somebody else is offering would." People, after one visit, people trusted me.

Fiksdal: Oh, yeah. That would impress me.

Alexander: Right. So, at any rate, I spent a lot of time catching on all these fields, so I could actually hold long conversations with faculty members on them. And, as you might imagine, this was enormously valuable preparation for the interdisciplinary programs that we wound up offering at Evergreen.

Fiksdal: Well, also, you were very current on the kinds of questions people were asking.

Alexander: Well, I was at that point.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Alexander: Later on, maybe not so current.

Fiksdal: Right.

Alexander: But I was comfortable with it. And so it didn't bother me that maybe, in the program, that we were doing, we weren't going to do any literature at all. That didn't bother me in the least.

Fiksdal: Interesting.

Alexander: In fact, I was quite happy with that.

Fiksdal: Huh.

Alexander: On the other hand, I was quite dedicated to literature, too.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Alexander: But that's part of it to go on. At any rate, I got fired from there. And . . . then . . . had already decided, after two years selling textbooks, that my almost congenital feeling of antipathy for the academic world was stupid; and that what I really wanted to do was be on the other side of the desk that was there. So, in order to do that, I had to go to graduate school, and went for three or four years.

So I wound up teaching and getting a Ph.D.—the master's degree very fast, and then a Ph.D. very slowly—and wound up teaching at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, in the mid-to-late '60s. So, to give people a sense of what that time was, my then-wife—we subsequently divorced when we were out living in Olympia—but Adrienne and I and a couple of friends went down to Selma. We would have been on the march if the march had been held at the time we went down.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Alexander: Nobody knew when the march was going to be held. Nobody knew. They couldn't possibly have planned when that date would be.

Fiksdal: No.

Alexander: It made me rather peculiar in the group. The other three people were all Yankees, and hadn't a clue about where they were going.

Fiksdal: Wait a minute. Where are you from?

Alexander: I'm from Atlanta, Georgia.

Fiksdal: Well, see, I didn't know that.

Alexander: No, you didn't. Born and raised. And that was basically where I was from for 30 years. And then, a year in New Orleans. And, in fact, my best friend's family were from Selma, as a boy.

Fiksdal: Oh? So you knew Selma. Yeah.

Alexander: I didn't know Selma. I'd never been there.

Fiksdal: Ah, okay.

Alexander: But I knew people who were from there, let's put it that way.

Fiksdal: Right.

Alexander: I learned a great deal more about Selma, even after I had been there. Selma's a very interesting small city, and by no means a benighted boondocks that a lot of people imagined it was. Certainly not. But at any rate, as a Southerner—and there are quite a few white Southerners who were on that side of the street in Selma—we were very important. I had my beard already. I grew a beard quite early.

Fiksdal: And why is that?

Alexander: I grew a beard because I discovered I looked good in it. And I've never liked—I've always had an aversion to mirrors. I can't stand to see myself in them. And after a while, I began realizing that, as I lathered my face, I found that I didn't look bad at all. [laughter] So I decided to keep the lather on permanently. And this was quite early, in the early '60s. So very, very few people had beards. Very few.

Fiksdal: Oh, interesting.

Alexander: Yeah. Young men, particularly, did not have them.

Fiksdal: So you stood out.

Alexander: I sure did. And I tell you, some of the television and the newspaper photographers and so forth were constantly zeroing in on me and taking all these pictures.

Fiksdal: That's very interesting.

Alexander: No one interviewed me.

Fiksdal: I was going to say, did you get to talk?

Alexander: No.

Fiksdal: Oh, too bad.

Alexander: Nobody interviewed me. Those of us who were Southerners at Selma knew instinctively—we knew before we got there—that our job was to do only what the people in Selma wanted us to do; to take their instructions; follow their instructions; don't do anything else. And it's in the nature of things that a lot of these instructions were coming from young teenagers, because they were the ones who didn't have to go to work.

Fiksdal: I see. So they were kind of the runners, and the people who would take messages?

Alexander: They did a hell of a lot more than just take messages.

Fiksdal: Oh, wow.

Alexander: They didn't do any—much planning. But they were in on everything, and they were the ones that we got our marching orders from.

Fiksdal: Oh, that's great. How long were you in Selma?

Alexander: We were there for about four or five days.

Fiksdal: Yeah? Wow. And do you remember the month, or the . . . ?

Alexander: Oh, no.

Fiksdal: That's okay.

Alexander: I have a very bad memory for dates.

Fiksdal: Yeah, it'd be kind of fun to go back.

Alexander: That's why I try to—I locate things in time by associating them with other events that took place before or after.

Fiksdal: Yeah, that's helpful. Yeah.

Alexander: At any rate, this is pertinent to how I got the job at Evergreen, by the way. Subsequently, of course, all the civil rights agitation broke out in the North. And while we were at Galesburg, we organized a group of students, at their request, to drive off to the march on the Pentagon. Very, very interesting. Not at all what people who weren't there imagine it was. It was, by far, the most patriotic event I've ever been involved with.

I remember marching—walking across one of the bridges from downtown D.C. to the Pentagon base. And there was this huge mob, and I turned to the young man who was walking next to me and I said, "They really missed the chance. They should be passing out American flags to all of us."

And he said, "Damn right." [laughing]

Yeah. Literally, people were just filled with the most extraordinary pride in being there, and being part of what we thought was a genuine American protest movement.

Fiksdal: So were the people that went with you—the students that wanted to do this—were they African American or were they primarily white?

Alexander: There were very few African Americans at Knox. The next year, there started to be.

Fiksdal: Yeah, because that's when I was in college.

Alexander: There were very few at that time, but the next year, the school had gotten its act together, and recruited a fairly large—I'd say 25, 30 students—that, in itself was a problem.

Fiksdal: We don't need to go into that. Right.

Alexander: At any rate, I got a letter from Jack Pickering. He had moved to San Francisco to work for a publishing house there. And I don't know how it is he met Mervyn Cadwallader, but one evening, Mervyn and his girlfriend of the moment—really fine woman named Micki Majors, who was the secretary of the Tutorials program, a very strong presence there. At any rate, the two of them went out to have dinner with Jack and his wife, and they got talking about students, radical students, and

difficulties and so on. And I'd been writing to him based on my experience with the students at Galesburg.

Fiksdal: Oh, great. So he had that.

Alexander: And Jack, without asking me, just turned over the correspondence to Mervyn. And the next thing I know, I'm getting this letter from Mervyn. My wife didn't want to stay in Galesburg. She wanted to get out of there. She was a native of Illinois, and she just wanted to be someplace else. But there weren't any jobs.

Fiksdal: Oh, I was going to ask you about the job market.

Alexander: There were not jobs. And I did go to interview at a big college in Rhode Island. Not Brown. [laughing] Roger Williams was the name of it. But I never came out to San Jose, and it [his hiring] was done entirely by mail.

Fiksdal: You're kidding.

Alexander: Yes.

Fiksdal: So maybe they didn't have the money to fly you out. Or what do you think?

Alexander: I'm not quite sure. I don't think that was the problem.

Fiksdal: Wasn't even the point. Ah, that's interesting.

Alexander: I don't. I think what the problem was that Mervyn was planning to leave San Jose, but he didn't want to tell me that.

Fiksdal: So what year was this? '68?

Alexander: It would have been . . . yeah, '68; '67-'68.

Fiksdal: '67-'68. Right.

Alexander: Okay. So at any rate, my wife and I discussed it, and decided that the Tutorials program sounded like a better fit for me than the Roger Williams job. I'm not exactly sure that that was really the case, but that's what we decided. And so I took the job; came out, only to discover, from Micki Majors, that Mervyn wasn't here. He was in New York. He was on Long Island. [laughing]

Fiksdal: At Old Westbury?

Alexander: At Old Westbury.

Fiksdal: So he had gone that year? Only that year?

Alexander: That's right.

Fiksdal: So he was only there one year.

Alexander: At Old Westbury?

Fiksdal: Yes.

Alexander: Right, he was at Old Westbury only one year.

Fiksdal: He had been hired there as a faculty member?

Alexander: Yes, and he had been hired there to put together this freshman-sophomore program of the Tutorials that he'd been running. The background to that is detailed fairly well in the book that Richard Jones wrote [*Experiment at Evergreen*]. And, of course, Jones can't be interviewed any longer.

Fiksdal: No, right.

Alexander: In fact, he couldn't have been interviewed for some years before his death. But his book became a kind of canonical account of the Tutorials program and the ideals of the coordinated studies programs. It's accurate, as far as it goes. Any of us who lived through those years know very well what the inadequacies of the book are. But it has remained, so far as I know, the only study of the origins of the academic program.

Fiksdal: Yeah. Charlie had a copy of a UW student's dissertation that looked also at these founding times, and goes into a little more detail in certain areas, because he was in education, department of education . . .

Alexander: Right. I think that I'm one of the people who was interviewed.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Alexander: And if this is the same person, he did a lot of stuff about friendship networks amongst the faculty.

Fiksdal: Yeah, he had some charts that Charlie showed me.

Alexander: Right.

Fiksdal: Because I did hear about, you know, this group came from there, this group came from there.

Alexander: That, as far as he goes in the reportage—and he left out certain things on purpose that they thought weren't really pertinent to his research, and they were getting too close to private matters that just were inappropriate to talk about in a book like that. But that's a very interesting study, and it really does—because friendship networking is a key to an awful lot of the detailed history of Evergreen, and why certain programs survived and others did not.

Fiksdal: Yeah, I think Charlie just mentioned that the year he was born, which was 1932, put him in a class of people for whom getting a job was really not that hard. And he felt—he's a little bit self-deprecating, as you know, so I think part of it was that he saw his rise to associate dean at Oberlin as just sort of, well, he was there and he could do it. But also, it was that there wasn't this vast array of people to choose from. But he said that he saw that people really needed jobs when they first started

hiring both the planning faculty and then the next years. And so it's great to have you next to be talking to me.

Alexander: Well, I was born in '34, so I'm in the same cohort that Charlie claims.

Fiksdal: But academically, you took two years off—

Alexander: I did more than that. I volunteered for the Army, because I wasn't planning on an academic career at all. In fact, I got out of college, and the last thing I wanted to do was to go to graduate school.

Fiksdal: And you're one of the most academic people I knew at Evergreen. [laughing]

Alexander: That may be, but I was just determined not to do that. But at that time—the late '50s—the draft was still on.

Fiksdal: Whatever for?

Alexander: Oh, it had never ceased.

Fiksdal: It just didn't cease.

Alexander: It had never ceased.

Fiksdal: Oh, it was just policy or something.

Alexander: Yeah, it never ceased. We had a draft all the way from—they got rid of it before the Korean War, and then suddenly had to revive it. And they kept running it all the way through the Vietnam War.

Fiksdal: Well, that part I know.

Alexander: But at any rate, even though we weren't fighting a war at the time, the draft was on. So companies weren't hiring you until after—if you were male—you had to have done your service, or an equivalent, or could in some way convince them that they weren't suddenly going to have to give you up, and then take you back in two years.

So I had a period of two years; and then another two years in there working for Rinehart; then six years of graduate school. It was very tough to get academic jobs. It was very, very tough.

Fiksdal: So it must have been sort of incredible then to actually get a letter inviting you to be a member of the faculty there.

Alexander: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Let's see, where were we going? So I get to San Jose, and Mervyn is nowhere to be seen. And he had thought that he had left the Tutorials program in good hands. Little did he know. And this is something that proves true at Evergreen as well.

The coordinated studies programs are entirely creatures of the mix of the faculty that happened to be joined in that program. And as soon as you change even one of those people, the dynamics of the program changes, and you can't reproduce it with a new person because they have a different training, a different personality, different relationship to their colleagues [laughing] if it's a real program. And the

only way you can do this is to restrict each individual faculty member's work to that faculty member's strengths and personality, and he doesn't interfere with anybody else. But that's the exact opposite of what is supposed to be going on in a coordinated studies program.

So I drop into this group. The five people I'm supposed to be working with, four of us had no experience in doing this before. One of us had.

Fiksdal: So Merv thought he had handpicked who was going to be in this?

Alexander: Right.

Fiksdal: So you weren't replacing someone; it was pretty much a new thing.

Alexander: Right. Well, we had two years of it, so there was one five-year group that had been working already for a year. Okay, they had the sophomores. And then there was my five. We had the freshmen, and of us, four were brand-new.

Fiksdal: My gosh.

Alexander: One was an artist who was practically crazy, well known for his wild San Francisco art and art theory—teach you how to teach art. *The Art of Teaching and the Teaching of Art* is one of the things that he wrote at one time, and it was just bizarre. We had another guy, who was an extremely conservative historian and student of German—[laughing]—the exact opposite of Zack [the artist], and me sitting in the middle. Well, that kind of thing is—at any rate, the conferences we had amongst each other, trying to figure out what it is we were going to teach and how, were just insane.

Fiksdal: And was this in August or September?

Alexander: It was the middle of the summer on.

Fiksdal: Well, thank goodness it was in the middle of the summer.

Alexander: Right. But mostly, it was in August before, you know, just scrambling around trying to put something together.

Fiksdal: Even the books. Nothing had been—nothing.

Alexander: Right, all that, all that. Nothing.

Fiksdal: Oh, wow.

Alexander: [Laughing] Just insane! And then here come the students, and they had no idea either. They had no idea what they were getting in for. Well, I quickly wrote a furious letter to Mervyn. And remember, our only contact had been by mail.

And I said, "You're the one who's responsible for all this." I told him long anecdotes about what was going on. [laughing] "You're the one who's responsible for this craziness. We'll get by, but you're a real son-of-a-bitch for having left us in this." You know? [laughing]

Fiksdal: You really said that?

Alexander: Oh, yes! [laughter] Because, god, I was—it was very stressful.

Fiksdal: Yeah, I can imagine.

Alexander: And I get this letter back saying, “Thank you for the very interesting letter. Keep it coming! Keep it coming!” Well, as it turned out—

Fiksdal: He just wanted accounts, like you had been doing about your students. [laughing]

Alexander: Right. Well, but also, of course, he was having similar difficulties at Old Westbury.

Fiksdal: Oh, I see. So he was trying to do the same thing there.

Alexander: Well, he was starting all new.

Fiksdal: But with his idea.

Alexander: Yes.

Fiksdal: I see.

Alexander: And finding it very difficult to transplant, and having enormous difficulties with the man who had been chosen as the president of Old Westbury. And everybody was unhappy. Everybody at Old Westbury was just as unhappy as they could be.

But he had taken a couple of people from San Jose State to Old Westbury with him, and recruited other people from the pool of faculty to work in this program. So the planning faculty is sort of overbalanced with a very large group of people who had had some experience running coordinated studies programs, and another group—slightly larger—that had no such experience. And, of course, the experienced ones turned out to be the “C’mon, take it slow. You don’t know what the problems are going to be. [laughing] You’ve got to make allowances for this and this and this and this and this.” And the other ones were “Oh, what the hell. That’s all that stuff we’re trying to get away from.”

Fiksdal: Interesting.

Alexander: You know, they wouldn’t—

Fiksdal: They just wanted to go, pell-mell.

Alexander: They wanted to go hell for leather. But they didn’t know where they were going, or why. But we’ll get to that.

Fiksdal: Let’s talk about it, yeah.

Alexander: At any rate, I kept in long correspondence, and I found it personally very useful, to me, to have this avenue where I could lay out—let off steam to somebody who knew what I was talking about; and also, to think through the nature of the problems that we were facing. That was part of my training for this [teaching at Evergreen].

At any rate, in the middle of the school year, after this long correspondence and so forth, Mervin showed up to see his ex-wife and his children, and to reconnect with Micki Majors. And, of course, I invited Micki and Mervin over for dinner. And Adrienne [Richard's wife] made this big dinner, and she's getting ready to bring the main course into the dining room from the kitchen, and Mervin says, "Richard, how would you like to teach at Evergreen?"

Now, we had read a newspaper piece in the *San Francisco Chronicle* about the founding of this new school that was going to be this, that and the other, with a picture of Charlie McCann there and so forth. Adrienne and I, who were very—I was quite . . . unhappy with the prospects at San Jose State.

Fiksdal: Could you just linger on that a little bit? Was it the team you were working with, or was it the chance for tenure? What was it?

Alexander: No, no, I wasn't thinking tenure, for god's sakes. We're in the middle of the first year of teaching someplace, and I'd gotten the impression that I wasn't very likely to get along very well with the English Department at San Jose State.

Fiksdal: Oh.

Alexander: And that was the alternative facing me.

Fiksdal: Yeah, but why was that a problem?

Alexander: I don't remember now. Because things just didn't work out that way.

Fiksdal: Yeah, you didn't really have to think about it.

Alexander: At any rate, Adrienne, we'd already talked about how wonderful that would be to go up there and work on founding this new college. And, wow, it was just the chance of a lifetime. And so [laughing] Adrienne's walking with the dinner tray, and he says, "How would you like to be on the faculty at Evergreen?" And she dropped the dinner all over the kitchen floor. [laughter]

Fiksdal: Oh, great story!

Alexander: So by that time, I had gotten over my anger at Mervyn, and he had explained to us the problems that he was facing at Old Westbury, and how it just wasn't going to work, it just wasn't going to do. And so he had immediately started looking, and had gotten in touch with the Board of Trustees and McCann.

Fiksdal: Oh? So he reached out.

Alexander: And there were other connections, too. So this group—which includes Byron Youtz and Larry Eickstaedt and his good friend, the biologist who died recently. C'mon. The bug man.

Fiksdal: Oh, Bob Sluss?

Alexander: You got it. Bob Sluss came from Old Westbury. And Bob Sluss had been at San Jose State, and had taught in the Tutorials.

Fiksdal: Interesting. And then he'd gone to Old Westbury.

Alexander: Right. And Richard Brian was teaching in the second year Tutorials.

Fiksdal: Was there anyone else from San Jose State that Merv tapped?

Alexander: Oh, yes. The fellow who became the Provost.

Fiksdal: Dave Barry?

Alexander: You've got it. But he told us all about this, and how he had recruited various people to do this, and he thought this was the time really to establish the coordinated studies program on a firm foundation.

Fiksdal: So when he talked to you at that dinner party, he'd already been hired then?,

Alexander: Yes.

Fiksdal: Okay, so he was at Old Westbury, and then— yes okay, then I understand. Because he and Charlie commuted to do the work at Evergreen.

Alexander: Right. Now's the time to talk about just what the Tutorials were . . .

Fiksdal: Yes.

Alexander: . . . and how Mervyn imagined them, and planned them to be, and how they actually worked. They were an honors program. That's a very key thing. They were an honors program for freshmen and sophomores. The assumption was that they would leave the honors program, and they would adopt a major, and they would go on and get a standard degree in a standard way in their junior and senior years. And this meant, because they had to get the general education requirements, that the Tutorials program would supply them with an equivalent to the general education requirements. But they would be given time to take the courses that were necessary for the major prerequisites, of course.

Fiksdal: Oh, okay, so they had opt-out times. Huh.

Alexander: Well, it had to go on simultaneously, so they took the Tutorials plus one course, sometimes two courses. And we had to juggle our scheduling, to a certain degree, to accommodate the schedules for their prerequisite courses.

Fiksdal: And it could be anything.

Alexander: It could be anything.

Fiksdal: Wow.

Alexander: But that turned out not to be a problem. That was a simple matter.

Fiksdal: Oh, good.

Alexander: You did have to work it out with the student and sometimes with the departments. But the really important thing here is that his assumption always had been that the students would have to get their prerequisites in order to major in something in their junior and senior years, and that that was exactly what they would do; they would have a separate non-coordinated studies junior and senior years.

Fiksdal: And yet, the Tutorial was full-time, right?

Alexander: No, it wasn't full-time. It couldn't be, because if it was full-time, they couldn't get their prerequisites.

Fiksdal: So it varied. So if a student needed two extra courses, it would vary for that person. Okay.

Alexander: Yes. But that's something that the person had to decide whether—

Fiksdal: Yeah, so they needed to know their major right away. [laughing] I would have been sunk.

Alexander: Right, and they didn't have to join this coordinated studies program.

Fiksdal: Were there other honors courses?

Alexander: Oh, yeah, there was plenty of them.

Fiksdal: I see. So they competed, in a way.

Alexander: Right. And it was very, very different; radically different from anything else that was being offered on the campus. And this student who could sign up for it—because they didn't have to sign up for that—could decide whether they wanted to do that or didn't want to do that. If they didn't want to do it, they just didn't do it.

Fiksdal: So what was the description you must have written?

Alexander: Well, it described what we were doing, and this, that, and the other. And if you wanted to do that, that's fine.

Fiksdal: But there were themes?

Alexander: Oh, yes.

Fiksdal: And so was there a common—

Alexander: Yes. That's what the five of us did in that month: invent what the theme was going to be and what the common readings were going to be and so forth. That part of it—the common readings—everybody, all the seminars, each of us had 20 students.

Fiksdal: So you did have a seminar. And you called it a seminar.

Alexander: Oh, yes. And it was the heart of the program. And we did other things.

Fiksdal: Then you had lectures. And did you attend your colleagues' lectures?

Alexander: Yes, of course.

Fiksdal: Because you needed to know.

Alexander: Absolutely. And we had a very important thing; it was the faculty seminars. We got together and—

Fiksdal: So he designed that, too.

Alexander: Oh, that was in the original design.

Fiksdal: That's interesting.

Alexander: And it was enormously important, and all of us agreed about it. Even though, in my case, they were very difficult to conduct, because the five of us were at loggerheads, in many ways.

Fiksdal: But the idea of the faculty seminar was not business. It was to discuss the books from different perspectives.

Alexander: Absolutely. And we realized almost immediately that that's how it had to be. And, by God, you didn't muck around with it; you didn't conduct business; you didn't put on a performance for students to come in and watch. Any of that stuff, that was just out. We never even considered that. The first that appeared at Evergreen, I was aghast. I thought, this is just terrible. This will have miserable effects on the seminar itself. I'm not sure that my worst fears came true, but I was—

Fiksdal: Do you remember that a lot of people did that?

Alexander: It became more and more popular starting about, let's say, the eighth year of the college.

Fiksdal: Okay. Well, somehow I missed it. That's interesting. Charlie did talk about one time he did that, and it was wonderful. But it helped stimulate the students a little more. I think it kind of helped the seminar in that case.

Alexander: Oh, what I was worried about is its ruining the faculty seminar. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Yes, exactly. Well, I think it wasn't all the time, it was just once or twice. I don't think it happened often. Yeah, I would agree that it could be very difficult if you did it all the time. So you had the faculty seminar. Oh, I wanted to ask—so you had regular grades for this?

Alexander: No. As I remember, we did have grades, yes, because that was required by the school. But we also wrote out long evaluations, and we had the students evaluate us, too.

Fiksdal: In length, like writing, not in little forms.

Alexander: At length, right. And Mervyn was very happy, he was really a bug for the students having a portfolio that they added to as they went through the college, and that they took from program to program to program.

Fiksdal: Now, that portfolio, what was its function?

Alexander: Well, its function was to have a record of the student's accomplishment and progress over the two years they were in the program—for themselves and for anybody in the future who wanted to look at it.

Fiksdal: So it wasn't used, for example, to go from year one to year two of the Tutorial.

Alexander: Yes, it did. People had their portfolio.

Fiksdal: So very much like the early years at Evergreen.

Alexander: Yeah. But because the same circumstances were not going to apply in their sophomore and senior years, the portfolio was the student's.

Fiksdal: Yeah. It just stayed with them.

Alexander: It stayed with them, and never became part of the records the . . .

Fiksdal: Like the Registrar?

Alexander: . . . the Registrar kept.

Fiksdal: How did you feel about that first year? You learned a lot, but did you feel it was sort of trial by fire?

Alexander: It was trial by fire. Toward the end of it—the personalities of the five of us were so different. There was one colleague that I was very close to, and he and I ran things in our seminars very much the same way. And that was a matter of personality. We didn't do it because anybody told us to do it. We would have done it that way even if the other person hadn't been around. But the other

three, kind of odd. See, you asked me a question, and I was thinking about another question, so I'm getting lost.

Fiksdal: Oh, sorry. So how you made it through that year. I guess I sort of wanted to know, what was the theme? What were you trying to explore? And how well do you think—

Alexander: Well, that, I don't remember. It is a long time ago.

Fiksdal: You don't remember? Isn't that interesting.

Alexander: It is a long time ago.

Fiksdal: So it was mostly the personal relationships that were so hard.

Alexander: Right. And I remember particular students and particular conversations with students.

Fiksdal: It was a traumatic year.

Alexander: Yeah, and that has very little to do with Evergreen.

Fiksdal: Yeah. Okay.

Alexander: But I became gradually, over the years, something of an enthusiast for the coordinated studies program as an ideal. And I thought the experience that I and my students had—and a whole bunch of the other students, too—the experience that they had as they worked through this was so valuable and so important that I was really quite an enthusiast for this.

Fiksdal: And I assume that means that you were learning a lot of new things as well as the students.

Alexander: Oh, god! Yes. Not as many as I would in some of the programs at Evergreen, because ours was kind of slapdash organized. And those of us who were basically building the curriculum—that was me and my other good friend, and we were pretty much on the same wavelength—we weren't drawn into areas where we would learn that much about the material. But I learned an awful lot about how these programs would work—what could go wrong; what you have to do right; what the good result is; how you can work to do it.

Fiksdal: Let's go back to the dinner party just for a moment. So she drops the food, and then do you both just say, "Yes"? What happened?

Alexander: Basically, that's what it was. But, of course, he couldn't give us the job right then.

Fiksdal: Did he do an interview with you, or how did that work out?

Alexander: Well, as far as he and I were concerned, he and I had been interviewing each other for a good year by mail. [laughter]

Fiksdal: Yes, right.

Alexander: So we didn't need an interview.

Fiksdal: Okay. So when did you head up to Olympia?

Alexander: Well, what happened was this. The deans and the Provost and . . . I've forgotten what Joe Shoben's job title was.

Fiksdal: Yeah, he was a VP, but I don't know . . .

Alexander: He was a Vice President in charge of something or other; and the Librarian, who was also a Vice President; and McCann had to get their act together. When they did, they began trying to line up people to interview. And most of the lining up took place by asking the deans and the rest of them if they had people in mind; to come up with lists of folks that they thought would be likely faculty candidates; and then contacting them privately to see if they were interested and so on; and then inviting them to come up.

A small number of people wrote in and contacted the school, saying that they were interested in coming. And this group would have included Rudy Martin and . . .

Fiksdal: David Marr?

Alexander: No, he was hired by us.

Fiksdal: Oh, that's right. Rudy was on the planning [faculty]. Okay.

Alexander: Okay, this is just the planning faculty.

Fiksdal: What about Sid White?

Alexander: Sid White had been at San Jose State, and I think he had been—yeah, I think Zack replaced Sid White in the . . . Crazy Zack. Zack really was . . . I don't think he was actually crazy, but he liked to affect it. So he worked out a wonderful type of art; that was vacuum cleaner art. It was made out of a vacuum cleaner engine, and mounted on the wall. You'd press a button and the engine would start, and it would inflate this large phallus, the bag. And then you'd turn it off. Okay, well, he put one up on the wall at the office of Tutorials. [laughter] It was up there for quite a while. Micki Majors thought it was a gas. [laughing]

Fiksdal: I'm going to ask you a question I asked Charlie.

Alexander: But that's the way Zack was.

Fiksdal: How many female colleagues did you have at San Jose State? Were there very many?

Alexander: In the Tutorials program? I have no idea about San Jose State generally.

Fiksdal: Okay, let's talk about the Tutorials program.

Alexander: None.

Fiksdal: Because we know, in the planning year, there weren't any women.

Alexander: That's right.

Fiksdal: So I'm just asking to kind of get a sense of the times, to try and understand it. Although I lived through the times; I know a little bit about it from that perspective.

Alexander: Well, I think you would really need to ask the remaining members of that small group. There are very few of them that remain. Charlie McCann is dead; I don't know where Joe Shoben is.

Fiksdal: No, I don't either.

Alexander: Mervyn is contactable.

Fiksdal: Yeah, we want to interview him. Someone has signed up.

Alexander: Yes, he is extremely important.

Fiksdal: Yeah, of course.

Alexander: In some ways, he's the most important. And . . . Humphrey?

Fiksdal: Don Humphrey, yeah.

Alexander: And Charlie. And the Librarian, who's now dead.

Fiksdal: Oh, he is?

Alexander: Right. Jim Holley?

Alexander: Yeah, Jim Holley. And the Treasurer. What was his name?

Fiksdal: Oh, Dean Clabaugh?

Alexander: Right. Now, if he's still alive, he could tell you quite a lot. Clabaugh was much more important than he's ever given credit for. And I think that the Provost was already on board and up there.

Fiksdal: Yeah, he was, I know.

Alexander: Okay. Well, if you got those people together, and then asked them—if you could somehow or another get them to be honest about it.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Alexander: But I can tell you what the attitude of the planning faculty was once we got there and discovered it was all male.

Fiksdal: You actually did notice it?

Alexander: Oh, yeah. [laughter] What the hell do you mean?

Fiksdal: That's reassuring.

Alexander: Yes, we noticed it, and we started making a point of interviewing women and trying to locate women. And we managed to persuade the deans, at least—I don't know about the rest of those muckety-mucks—that we absolutely needed women faculty. And they were willing about some people that you know who got on there. And then there were a bunch of others. For instance, I strongly recommended a young woman, whose name at that time was Kathy Kempke. And she was vetoed emphatically by Mervyn to be hired to work in the Japan program that I had planned for the next [year]. . . but without her, there was no way to run that, so it didn't go—fly—for the first year.

Fiksdal: Well, we're at 12:00. Do you want to take a little break?

Alexander: We better turn this off.

End Part 1 of 3 of Richard Alexander on 12-7-16

Begin Part 2 of 3 of Richard Alexander on 12-7-16

Fiksdal: This is the second part of Richard's first interview.

Alexander: All right. Am I recording properly?

Fiksdal: You are. Looks good.

Alexander: Okay, I want to go back in time to how Evergreen was founded by the state, and how it got to Olympia. There had been discussion about having a new state college in Washington for a long time, at least 10 years. But since your parents were involved in it, I imagine it's 15 or 20 years or something of that sort.

Fiksdal: Could have been.

Alexander: At any rate, things came to a head in the '60s. I'm not sure when the debate started being official in the Legislature, but it wouldn't surprise me to learn that there was legislative discussion and debate as early as '61 or something of that sort.

Part of the reason that this all came to a head was that the state was experiencing a spurt in population; lots of people coming into the state. The fastest-growing sector in the state was Southwestern Washington, and it was the only section in the state that had no state college. Every

other section was reasonable efficiency—served by one or another of the other three state colleges—Western, Eastern and Central.

At the same time, there was talk about moving all the state offices from Seattle down to the State Capital in Olympia, and this put even more pressure on there being a state college somewhere in Southwestern Washington state, to provide various services—research; interns; schools of public administration; graduates from the college who could go to work for the state agencies and so on, something that had previously been supplied reasonably well by the college system available in Seattle. But now, that would turn out to be quite inefficient for most of the people who were working for the state government who would need to have a college reasonably close.

At the same time, there were other parts of the state that were under increasing pressure to have a state college close to them, the Vancouver-Portland area being the chief one, but there were others as well. So there was a big debate as to where the college should be. This was finally decided on Olympia, in my understanding, because of the proximity to the state government. There probably were a number of other decisions as well.

The next big issue was where you would put it. And at that time, that whole bluff that overlooks the lake.

Fiksdal: Oh, Mottman area, yeah.

Alexander: Up where the big hotel is now, and a whole lot of apartment buildings and condo buildings that weren't there at all, that whole thing was just open forest at that time. That was what was initially thought to be the perfect place to have the college. But largely as a matter of real estate speculation—and this is the kind of thing that I think Dean Clabaugh would really have the inside track on all of that.

What I had been told was that the man who owned this second- and third-growth forest area that is where Evergreen is now really lobbied hard to put the college out there, even though this would not have any of the advantages that a campus up on that bluff would have. And why it was chosen, I was told, was it was basically a real estate deal, and that this would have cost the state less to build out there. And other people wanted that bluff to develop.

At any rate, it was decided that, yes, the college would be put out there. First, that it would be in Olympia, which took a tremendous amount of lobbying in the areas. And once it was decided it was Olympia, there was plenty of residual resentment.

Nobody imagined that this place—this new college that was going to be built—would differ in any material way from Central or Eastern or Western. It was just going to be a standard state college. And, in fact, the enabling legislation gives Evergreen the authority to establish schools of education, and to grant special degrees, and accreditation for public schools. It empowers them to establish a nursing school. And it lists all the things that ordinary state colleges would have, and for which they needed state authorization to pass the test for the accrediting boards and so on and so forth. And the college was to be named Southwestern Washington State College.

Once that was passed, Daniel Evans, the Governor, held a press conference to announce this great thing that was going to happen in Olympia. And in that announcement, he said, “This is not going to be just any kind of college. This will be a special college; this will be different.” This is the first anybody had ever heard of that.

Now, it needs a little background. This all takes place in the 1960s. In the 1960s in the United States, every group of people that you can imagine were angry at the university and college curriculum and the situations. The students were angry at it; the parents of the students were angry at it; the alumni were angry at it; the business community was angry at it. On it goes. You just name your group of people, and they all thought that the situation in higher education was terrible, and that it needed to be changed. And the word that kept being used, over and over and over again, was “relevant.” Everybody thought that the college education had become irrelevant to the needs and lives of the citizens of the country. The problem is that none of these different groups agreed with each other as to what the relevance was that it didn’t have. [chuckles] They all had different notions of what would be relevant—very different, radically different. And many of these notions were completely incompatible with each other.

The students, for instance—many of the most vocal students—some of them wanted it to be totally different. For instance, there was one group who would become the hippie faction that was growing mightily—and it was growing throughout the ‘50s, late ‘50s particularly with the Beat Generation, and its enthusiasm for Zen Buddhism and various other things—they wanted more and more spiritual exercises; they wanted more students defining what their studies should be, radical in that form.

Then there was another group of students who didn’t want that at all, but were deeply concerned about civil rights and workers’ rights and poverty and so on, the folks who would become

Students for a Democratic Society. And the Students for a Democratic Society, at that point, had no interest whatsoever in drugs and utopian communities and the hippie lifestyle. They held that in contempt. What they wanted was . . . oh, my brain isn't coming up with the type of democracy that they wanted.

Fiksdal: I don't know. Egalitarian or . . . ?

Alexander: Well, that could be. But they essentially wanted an anarchist in the old Kropotkin sense, where government would be decentralized. There wouldn't be all this big massive control in the center and so forth. Participatory democracy.

Fiksdal: Oh, participatory. Well, it seems like those two words, isn't that democracy? Democracy is supposed to be participatory. [laughing]

Alexander: But representative democracy. They wanted participatory, where people were actively participating in the government, instead of choosing representatives who would run the government. So those two groups of students were at loggerhead, and then there were other students who didn't want anything to do—they were the majority—didn't want anything to do with all this.

Fiksdal: Either one, yeah.

Alexander: And the business community were complaining right and left—just everybody complained—that the graduates coming out of the colleges didn't have the right training; they didn't have the right attitudes to work well in business; that they had to be constantly retraining people. [chuckles] And it kept going in this direction. But as long as everybody talked generalities, everyone could agree that colleges were not relevant anymore, and that they needed to be different.

Fiksdal: And different was okay.

Alexander: And all kinds of differences. Okay. So Dan Evans announced that this new college was going to be different. It wasn't going to be organized like colleges that we had been having. It would provide a relevant educational experience.

This speech, this press conference didn't make much of a ripple in its way, but internally, it made a lot of difference. So Evans and his crew put together a Board of Trustees. And they selected that Board of Trustees for people who would be amenable to this different kind of education, whatever it would be. And then they started looking around for a President. I think that was one of the first administrative positions that was filled.

Fiksdal: That's what I heard, yeah.

Alexander: And Mr. McCann had just made a big reputation for himself. He had been a member of the academic administration at Central State College. And he had made a big splash by giving speeches and acting against the school of education. That was his primary target. He didn't want any schools of education at all. He thought that they were anti-academic and terribly . . . he was against all sorts of other things that were characteristic of Central, and he was not one to keep his mouth shut about his discontent.

And I am getting a telephone call.

End Part 2 of 3 of Richard Alexander on 12-7-16

Begin Part 3 of 3 of Richard Alexander on 12-7-16

Fiksdal: Okay, we'll just pick up.

Alexander: Okay. So Mr McCann impressed these folks considerably, and they thought, well, why should we go out of the state when we've got just the kind of person that we're looking for to become President?

When this seemed to be cemented, Dan Evans proposed that the name of the college be chosen—be changed—and that it should be called The Evergreen State College because it was going to be a new kind of college for the entire state of Washington, and the state of Washington is "The Evergreen State." So that's why "The" is in the name of the college, and that's why we call this place The Evergreen State College and not Southwestern Washington State College.

And Dr. McCann then began going around the state making speeches—he made the same speech everywhere; he wrote it out—about what the new college was going to be like. Of course, he didn't have anybody to talk to except himself, and this was his dream of what the college should be. This is a very interesting speech. It was sent to everybody who was a prospective faculty member for the planning faculty. And we were all asked to write our responses and remarks and criticisms of this speech before we came, so that the deans and the assembled higher administration would know where we stood on these issues.

Now, it's a very interesting speech, and this is what it describes:

- There wouldn't be any classes.
- There wouldn't be any departments.

- There wouldn't be any bells ringing to tell you when it was time to change classes. Of course, there wouldn't be any classes, [laughter] so you couldn't change them anyway.
- There wouldn't be any schedules of this sort.
- There wouldn't be any graduation requirements.
- There wouldn't be any prerequisites, except the prerequisites that a faculty member and a group might impose upon themselves for some reason.
- The faculty would hang out a shingle in front of their doors. That's exactly the language that he used. I'm not sure what it would have actually looked like, but you can think of a sign that says "Dr. Richard Alexander, and I am competent to do work in this field, this field, this field, this field, this field, this field, this field." Okay, that would be outside the door.
- The students would go around looking for faculty who were competent to teach them.
- There wouldn't be any classes in this. Everything would be done by individual contract.

Fiksdal: Oh, so it was a little bit like the British system.

Alexander: Yes, this is exactly what he had in mind. Exactly what he had in mind.

- Nothing would last longer than one month.

Fiksdal: Oh my goodness.

Alexander: You'd go; you would sign a contract—one student, one faculty member. The faculty member would have more than one student, but the student would have only one faculty member. Unless, of course, they worked out a deal that the contract you wanted would involve two faculty members. At any rate, you were supposed to improvise this.

You sign a contract. You work on the contract for a month. At the end of the month, you write these narrative evaluations. There aren't going to be any grades. No grades. Everything would be written evaluations. The student would write an evaluation, the faculty member would write an evaluation. And then it's fruit-basket upset.

Fiksdal: Again.

Alexander: Again. Month by month by month by month.

Fiksdal: Gee, I bet you had a few things to argue with in that vision.

Alexander: Everybody had something to argue with. And I had plenty. But as far as my story is concerned, the really important thing to notice is the absolute conflict between the Cadwallader notion of what coordinated studies are, and the McCann notion of school as an individual contract.

Now, in fact, every major, and most of the minor, people hired during this time had their own notion of what they wanted to see happen at Evergreen. The Librarian, for instance, Jim Holley, his idea was that the whole college would be a library.

Fiksdal: Oh, I kind of remember that.

Alexander: And people would go and check out what they needed from the library.

Fiksdal: The necessary resources, yeah.

Alexander: This actually folded into the McCann idea fairly well. But Holley wanted a major role for the library to play in everything. In other words, you went and checked out what you were getting. Joe Shoben's idea was to have lots and lots of experiential learning, and credit for past experiences.

Fiksdal: Oh, so he was the one.

Alexander: There were great partisans for individual contracts on another basis altogether, but nobody had any idea how these would work. This became the bailiwick of one faculty member, Jack Webb.

Fiksdal: Oh, yeah. And Charlie tells it a little differently. See if this jives. He said that when he was at one of the weekend meetings that they had as deans with the higher administration, they got pressed pretty hard for coming up with, what is the vision of the college? And Don Humphrey—

Alexander: Who was this meeting with? The deans?

Fiksdal: He's talking from the deans' point of view.

Alexander: Right.

Fiksdal: And he said everyone else was there—the President, the VPs. Maybe Jim Holley; I don't really know about him.

Alexander: Jim Holley was a VP.

Fiksdal: Yes, so he would have been there.

Alexander: Yeah.

Fiksdal: And the administration was pushing the deans to come up with what the college was going to be like so they could—so then, the hiring of the planning faculty could take place.

Alexander: That's right. That's absolutely correct. That was my next step on here.

Fiksdal: So Merv talked about what he called "theme teams," which was your Tutorial that he had run, and how he'd like to do that for a couple of hundred students. And Don Humphrey, at that meeting—

which Charlie has listened to on tape and found the exact place where it happens—at that meeting, Don Humphrey said, “Well, if it’s good enough for 200 students, it’s good enough for everyone.”

And Charlie then said—not exact words what I’m saying—Charlie said, well, I haven’t talked to Merv about this prior, but it does sound like a good idea to me. And everybody jumped on it; so it would be these theme teams. Does that seem correct?

Alexander: That’s the version I got from Mervyn.

Fiksdal: Okay. And Merv was taken aback.

Alexander: Yeah, to say the least.

Fiksdal: Oh, to say the least. So I haven’t heard his perspective, but you can say what [it was].

Alexander: Well, first of all—and you should interview Mervyn and get the story from him.

Fiksdal: Yeah, we’re hoping.

Alexander: I would probably introduce my own distortions into this.

Fiksdal: Well, we all have our own perspectives. That’s okay.

Alexander: But I wasn’t there so—

Fiksdal: Right, but you were in contact with him.

Alexander: I was in contact with him. But he didn’t share this kind of stuff with me exactly. Not early. And why would he? But he literally thought—he had read McCann’s speech, and he’s one of the few people who read it thoroughly, and recognized what it actually said. And he thought initially that that sort of thing stood a great chance of becoming the thing. And he was afraid that he had to fight very hard to get even one coordinated studies program.

Fiksdal: Oh, I see.

Alexander: So you set 100, 200. Well, what that would have meant was two such programs. And he actually thought that they should be on the model of San Jose; that is to say they would be honors programs, and limited to people in the first two years of the school, and that they would simultaneously preparing for their discipline, and on and on. Like that. So the idea, especially coming from a scientist, that this would be the way that the sciences would be taught—everything would be taught—just flabbergasted him. He couldn’t imagine how it could be.

Fiksdal: Charlie said that, too, but he said that at that meeting, Don Humphrey got most of the comments, and most of the queries, because nobody could imagine that science could be taught that way.

Alexander: Right.

Fiksdal: But he argued that it could, and he gave some examples or whatever.

Alexander: Well, I don't know what happened in that meeting.

Fiksdal: I don't know either.

Alexander: What I know is that what happened when I came up for my interview.

Fiksdal: Good. What happened?

Alexander: Well, it happened in the middle of the winter, and I had gotten a bad cold. So Richard Brian and I are flying up from San Jose, and we arrive. On the flight my eardrum broke.

Fiksdal: Oh gosh!

Alexander: And we arrive in Olympia, and there's nothing out at the campus except a number of huge holes in the ground, filling up with water

Fiksdal: Of course.

Alexander: And a slope covered with mud, and rain on it. And trailers [laughing] connected with covered walkways and wooden walkways. [laughing] Planks.

Fiksdal: And when they're wet, they're slick.

Alexander: Yes. And it was cold and it was damp, and my ear was oozing all this stuff. And there wasn't anybody there.

Fiksdal: Nobody met you?

Alexander: Oh, yes, somebody did. And there was staff people there. Nancy Taylor was there. A group of the librarians. Who's the most famous Librarian?

Fiksdal: Besides Jim Holley? Well, Malcolm Stilson?

Alexander: Malcolm Stilson was there. They were busy moving everything that they had acquired so far from the old Olympia Brewery [laughter] out to these trailers. They had no buildings. They had nothing. Jim Holley was there walking around. And, oh, now, a fellow who worked for . . . I've forgotten what his role was, but he's the one who inspired Super Saturday.

Fiksdal: Larry Stenberg?

Alexander: Larry Stenberg was there. Oh, god, it was good to have Larry Stenberg there. It was always good to have Larry Stenberg there. Very important guy. Is he still around?

Fiksdal: I'm not too sure. I looked at the list of people—

Alexander: I think Stenberg deserves an interview.

Fiksdal: Okay.

Alexander: Stenberg was one of the most important people there. And a sane and *gemutlichkeit*-type guy, who spread joy everywhere, and made sure that Evergreen kept a sense of humor about it all. Stenberg was very important for all of us.

But that's who were there, and they kept saying, "Well, we don't know when they're going to arrive. They're on their way from New York and from"—all this. [laughing]

And Richard and I were sitting there. "Should we wait for these guys? Should we wait?"

Fiksdal: My gosh, yeah.

Alexander: Finally it got to where if they didn't show up that day, we couldn't stay, because we had to get back. And they did, and we started the interview early in the morning. And I'm still oozing, and my ear is aching and so forth. And I remember being put in one of the larger rooms in one of these trailers. They put me in a corner. This is about the shape.

Fiksdal: Oh, gosh. Small.

Alexander: No, it was larger than this, but this is the shape—long, rectangular room. And they put me in a corner like that, and they interrogated me and I felt like . . .

Fiksdal: . . . interrogation.

Alexander: Exactly.

Fiksdal: Oh, wow.

Alexander: And the deans were sitting around the side and they were asking—

Fiksdal: But there were only three of them.

Alexander: No, there was a whole bunch.

Fiksdal: Oh, a bunch of other people. Oh, the admin.

Alexander: I was one of the first people to arrive.

Fiksdal: Oh, I see.

Alexander: Richard—the two Richards, we were the first—

Fiksdal: Oh, it is funny, isn't it? The two Richards were the first—

Alexander: Yeah, right. Well, we were interviewed quite separately.

Fiksdal: I see.

Alexander: As you would expect.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Alexander: And so they would ask me questions about how this should be and so forth, and I would try to answer them. Finally, it would get around to—and I was getting more and more upset at the absence of decisions. And it was obvious that nobody had any idea of—there wasn't any comprehensive idea in operation.

Fiksdal: So they couldn't even ask you, "Can you do X?" Because they didn't know what it was.

Alexander: Yes, exactly. They didn't know what it was going to be.

Fiksdal: Oh, my gosh. That's so hard.

Alexander: So then they asked me, "How would we do this with the sciences?" And I remember I was getting very short of temper at this point.

I remember turning to him and saying, "You have been thinking about this, I suppose, for at least three months and haven't come up with an idea. And I haven't been thinking of it at all."

There's this gasp in the room. [laughing] And it was late in the afternoon. I had to get into a cab or a bus to take me to the airport in Sea-Tac. We had to get out of there. And I got up, walked out, and Charlie Teske was right behind me. And as we walked out these wooden plankways, he says, "Don't be upset about this! Please don't write us off." [laughter] And I'm "Growl, growl, growl."

And Brian and I got in that airplane, and we just talked. "Do we really want to get involved in this damn thing?" And "What do you think is going to happen?"

And as far as the two of us were concerned, we allowed our dissatisfaction with conditions at San Jose, and our . . . the only word that's appropriate is "loyalty" . . . our feelings of . . . we felt that Mervyn was at least being sensible [laughing] and had an idea, and that somehow or another, he would bring it off.

Now, the odd thing was that McCann, at least so far as the planning faculty was concerned, didn't interfere very much with what we did; didn't interfere directly. He didn't attend the meetings; he didn't ask people to come up and consult with him; he didn't write memos to us.

Fiksdal: So he didn't push his agenda.

Alexander: No. He didn't push positively.

Fiksdal: What do you mean?

Alexander: Because he would veto things.

Fiksdal: I see.

Alexander: Whenever anybody got close to "Well, what are we going to do about teacher training?" "We're not going to have any teacher training." [pounds on table] That's it.

Fiksdal: Oh, wow. And he was very definitive.

Alexander: Yeah. "We're not going to have any grades." [pounds on table] That's it. "We are not going to have bells ringing, and classes." [pounds on table]

Fiksdal: He didn't want classes all through the planning year?

Alexander: That's right.

Fiksdal: Well, how in the world did you plan coordinated studies without classes?

Alexander: Well, we had seminars. That was fine.

Fiksdal: Well, that's a class.

Alexander: No, no, no. You're talking about holding a lecture.

Fiksdal: Oh, all right.

Alexander: Okay? It took a long time, like I think five years of struggle, before it was permissible for anybody to organize a class, and to admit students into it who are not members of a program that you were working for.

Fiksdal: One of the questions I was interested in is what thought had been given to part-time students.

Alexander: None.

Fiksdal: And that answers—

Alexander: Zero.

Fiksdal: Yeah, that answers it. And you think it took—what?—eight years, you said, more or less?

Alexander: This could be found. I'm absolutely certain that they must have kept minutes of the deans' meetings.

Fiksdal: Oh, right. Well, I could try looking it up. It's just interesting.

Alexander: Yeah. All of these issues were there at the beginning, and they kept bubbling and bubbling and bubbling and bubbling away.

A lot of what we need to put in another subsequent thing is, for instance, the teachers college business came up almost immediately, because Evergreen was approached by the Makahs at Neah Bay, who wanted us to organize a teacher training program for Native Americans that would be based at Neah Bay.

Fiksdal: Wow.

Alexander: And I began traveling up there to meet with—

Fiksdal: That's really far.

Alexander: Oh, yeah.

Fiksdal: I was just there this last summer. It's just really far. [laughing]

Alexander: Did you go to the wonderful museum that they have?

Fiksdal: Yes. It's incredible.

Alexander: Oh, incredible. Oh, I am so fond of the Makahs.

Fiksdal: Yeah, it's just the most extraordinary thing I've ever seen.

Alexander: Right, it is. Everybody needs to go there.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Alexander: But that was just gleams in people's eyes at that time. But they were ambitious, and they wanted a teacher training program.

Fiksdal: That's very interesting.

Alexander: They knew exactly what it was they wanted. They wanted us to organize it, sponsor it, so that they could award certificates, and these certificates would be good in any state of Washington school, including non-tribal schools, if the graduate wanted—

Fiksdal: Sure. The graduate should be able to go wherever they want.

Alexander: Right. At any rate—well, we can talk about this later what happened.

Fiksdal: Okay.

Alexander: But that raised the whole issue. McCann said, “No.”

Fiksdal: He was against it. I really have to say, I do understand his position at that time, for what they really were at that time. Because I had friends in college who were just—they were doing the things they were going to teach children to do. They were actually doing the folds and making the—it was not academic. It was terrible. [laughing]

Alexander: Well, in any case, the issue came up and was vetoed soundly.

Fiksdal: How did you feel about that relationship, where he basically just vetoed and didn’t—

Alexander: There was a lot of resentment.

Fiksdal: Yeah, that’s what I would imagine.

Alexander: There was a great deal of resentment. But it also had—if I can put it this way—this intransigence had positive effects as well. But it didn’t involve discussion with the faculty. For instance, the whole business of not having any grades, and substituting narrative evaluations, but there was no discussion of what these narrative evaluations should be like.

Fiksdal: So you felt that there was something you could do to create them.

Alexander: It didn’t get that much discussion.

Fiksdal: Oh, I see.

Alexander: And, in fact, the student self-evaluation, as far as I know, this was never discussed in detail. It certainly wasn’t discussed during the planning faculty.

Fiksdal: For heaven’s sakes.

Alexander: And I don’t know of any other faculty meeting at any point—or, let’s say, the famous Lake Quinault meeting—we didn’t talk about that. The first time anything got codified was when my friends in the Registrar’s office and the Student Advising office—with whom I did a lot of work off and on over the years—they asked me to write up something that could be given to students advising them how to write a self-evaluation.

Fiksdal: What a good idea. [laughing]

Alexander: You should see what I wrote. It’s still being passed out, at least it was the last time I had any contact—

Fiksdal: Oh, it’s on our Web site then?

Alexander: I should hope so.

Fiksdal: Yeah, I'll check it out and show it to you and see.

Alexander: Yeah, see whether it's there.

Fiksdal: It's good enough. [laughing]

Alexander: No, I made a big case for self-evaluation. I'm one of the last real believers in it. But students have to be advised how to do it.

Fiksdal: Yeah, of course they do.

Alexander: And the last thing they need is to have a faculty member who says, "Oh, nobody ever reads this."

Fiksdal: Well, we now have a system. Our system now is that every student must write a self-evaluation. However, that self-evaluation does not have to go into the official transcript. Because the big problem we had over the years—certainly when I was dean, I heard a lot about it—was that the transcript was just too thick, too unwieldy. It was just too much. And people were writing self-evaluations for each thing that they were doing. It was supposed to be outside the class and inside the class—right?—originally. So that got too long. Anyway, so now, the students decide, which is probably fine.

Alexander: Yeah. My personal solution to a lot of this was to give grades and require a self-evaluation. Because in many cases, the self-evaluation that gets written leaves ambiguous the whole question of, what's the quality of this work?

Fiksdal: Well, that's true. But the thing that I always noticed about them is that—and the reason why I started requiring them before I even sat down to write their evaluations—was that there was this whole different perspective on maybe how hard they had worked to achieve what they had achieved, or how they had done this whole other study and were able to use some of that, when I didn't know where it came from. So that helped me a lot later to write the evaluations. But that's very interesting.

Alexander: Yeah. There's another piece of this that let's do while we've got the thing, and then we'd better go.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Alexander: If the vice presidents and the deans were divided over what they thought the school should be, the faculty that got hired were just as much divided. Sometimes the divisions were broad. For instance, as I mentioned before, you had those of us who had actually worked in a coordinated studies. Originally, they weren't called coordinated studies, but there was this long debate as to what the hell

we're going to call these things. And, clumsy at that is, that was the term—the only thing that people could settle on, and it works pretty damn well, really.

Fiksdal: I think it's a good term.

Alexander: It's a good term. It describes what we do. But everybody came with their own idea, most of them not global ideas. Very few of us on the planning faculty had thought through what the curriculum as a whole, or the school as a whole, should be like. A few of us had, and I'll include myself amongst them. But most people just had elements of the curriculum, or elements of the school that they were committed to, and they wanted that to appear and be there.

For instance, one of my good friends on the faculty, Bill Aldridge, what he wanted more than anything else was to have intimate, friendly...relations between faculty and students, which he thought of in terms of therapy.

Fiksdal: Yikes!

Alexander: A therapist and his client.

Fiksdal: Right, because he was a psychologist.

Alexander: Right. And he wanted programs that took the student's psychological condition . . . there is a special word for that would be better.

Fiksdal: Now, there's this kind of notion of the holistic.

Alexander: Yeah, he wanted to very holistic about that.

Fiksdal: Yeah, he wanted to be holistic. So was he the one that decreed or said that we should be called by our first names as faculty?

Alexander: I'm not sure.

Fiksdal: It sounds like it would be part of that.

Alexander: Bill should be interviewed . . .

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Alexander: . . . and asked about it.

Fiksdal: I've told Sam.

Alexander: But he may be quite reluctant, because he left the school under very bad circumstances. Same way with Mr. Webb, who really did yeoman service setting up individual contracts, and then received damn little credit for it and a lot of kicks. He didn't deserve what happened to him. But then, he's also responsible for his own fate. And I'm not sure that he's going to want to talk with you either.

Richard Brian was very concerned about how the hell are they going to teach mathematics here. And that in itself, he couldn't—he and Fred . . .

Fiksdal: Tabbutt?

Alexander: Not Fred Tabbutt, but the older man. He may have died before you got there. There's some debate as to which of us, Fred or I, were the first hired.

Fiksdal: Oh.

Alexander: One or the other of us were.

Fiksdal: Okay.

Alexander: Fred is the guy who hired Betty Estes.

Fiksdal: Nothing's coming to me right now, but I'll think about it.

Alexander: He was a mathematician, and he was very concerned about that, too.

Fiksdal: Seems like I would know his name, too.

Alexander: Everybody had this different perspective on things. Willi Unsoeld was the weirdest, as far as that's concerned. Because what Unsoeld wanted was basically to set up these . . .

Fiksdal: Oh, the challenge courses.

Alexander: . . . experience, challenge, and risk, and mountain climbing and so forth.

Fiksdal: Well, we've got one still.

Alexander: Yeah. Unsoeld. But everybody had a completely different perspective on these things. And you just multiply that, because the people who were hired for the first faculty—not the planning faculty but the first faculty—they wound up bringing their own perspectives.

Fiksdal: Yeah. But I understand that you spent a good deal of your time in the planning year creating a program that would be taught in that first year. Is that right?

Alexander: Yes. First of all, we had to decide what all these things meant. And then we turned to, well, we've got to figure out what kind of faculty, and what specialties or what kind of people, and start doing it. A good half of the work that we did was simply hiring the new faculty.

Fiksdal: Oh, you, by interviewing as well, not just—

Alexander: Oh, yes.

Fiksdal: So then it was not just the deans, it was you, too?

Alexander: No, no. The deans had relatively little to do with it, except to veto. For instance, Kathy Kempke, I was just enthusiastic about her working with me in the Japan program—and she would have been absolutely terrific—and she was all enthusiastic, too. But Cadwallader thought she was too . . . I wish I could bring into mind the exact phrase he used.

Fiksdal: Not narrow?

Alexander: No, she was too much . . . ambitious for herself.

Fiksdal: Maybe not collaborative enough or something?

Alexander: Oh, no.

Fiksdal: Oh, it's two separate things. Okay.

Alexander: She would have been very collaborative. Another partisan for her was Al Wiedemann. We were so pissed off, I tell you. [laughing]

Fiksdal: It would be really hard, because that's who you wanted to teach with.

Alexander: That's who we wanted.

Fiksdal: And you, above all, knew that the personality and all of that—the coming together, the planning—is crucial. You knew about that because of the horrible year you'd spent.

Alexander: Right.

Fiksdal: So it's too bad he couldn't value that.

Alexander: Yeah. He saw her as the career woman type, who was really pushing to advance herself as a woman. I don't think it was true of Kathy, but that's what he perceived. And it's probably, since I've continued in contact with her all these years, it's a good thing that she did not join us. She would have been very unhappy. Not those first two years, but . . . I mean, we got Carri Cable instead, and Carri was perfect.

Fiksdal: Yeah.

Alexander: She was perfect. At any rate, there were all kinds of small factions. Those with experience and those without the experience. And then there were those of us who were more “touchy-feely” was the words that got used—Bill Aldridge would have been in that camp—and those of us who were more academically committed. And, as usual with me, since this is the thing, I was in the middle of all of these different factions. [laughing]

Fiksdal: But that sounds like a good thing, so you could hear from different groups.

Alexander: Yes, but it also was kind of weird. The young man who did the study—which he went around doing people’s networks, friendship networks—he said to me after he’d gotten it all done, he said, “Your friendship network is just the most amazing thing that I’ve ever seen. You’ve got friends in every faction of the faculty, along with the people that you are definitely not friends with.” [laughing]

There was a whole bunch of people that I couldn’t stand. Willi Unsoeld was one of them. So what happened to Willi was a surprise to me. No, it was not a surprise, but it was a shock, let’s put it that way.

Fiksdal: When he died, you mean?

Alexander: The way in which he died. And I was a good friend of the young man who was in his program and tried to warn everybody not to go. And I forget his name, too. Really nice fellow. Very dedicated to his students, and who did very good work, and was, as far as I’m concerned, savaged by the Willi partisans.

And there were a whole bunch of people that I just really didn’t get along well with at all. And then a whole bunch of others that I got along with quite well, but they were scattered all over everywhere. I’ve always been a real good friend of Steve Herman’s.

Fiksdal: I think we have time for me to ask you, why were you in a trailer doing some planning, anyway, for languages with Al Wiedemann? In other words, first of all, why were you mates?

Alexander: All of us were interviewing everybody.

Fiksdal: Okay.

Alexander: Does that answer your question?

Fiksdal: No.

Alexander: All of us interviewed everyone.

Fiksdal: Just go back a step.

Alexander: But he wasn’t planning languages. And in my case, it was only one language: Japanese.

Fiksdal: Okay. Well, I was sent to you because I was told you were planning languages. And I can remember—here’s just my memory—this trailer, and this long table with almost every conceivable kind of machine on it—things that I had grown up with, like those slides that go one by one as you turn them, with the film in it—you had a whole bunch of things about reading, things that might help a student read faster—that was a big deal back then—where they could shine a light maybe in the middle,

because the theory was that you read just the middle, you don't read the whole, the kind of take it all in somehow.

You had all these machines, and my big memory was you were trying to figure out how students could learn a language with a machine. And I really remember it, because I remember that I went to see you several times, not just once, and that you were both sort of incredible to me. You both listened—I was a lot younger, didn't have a Ph.D.—and you listened to what I thought would be the best way to teach language. Whether you remember any of it or not, I don't know.

Alexander: I don't remember sitting in that room, but that's a kind of giveaway. Because the only sort of room that I could have been in would be a room in which the Library was putting together something.

Fiksdal: Ah-h. So we just met by hazard in that place. It wasn't—

Alexander: Well, it wouldn't have been by hazard, because the Library—remember, I said that Holley had this vision of the whole damn college being the Library. Well, it wound up that for everything except science equipment . . .

Fiksdal: Ah, they were buying . . .

Alexander: . . . Jim Holley and his staff were in charge of the buying.

Fiksdal: That makes a lot of sense.

Alexander: And since nobody knew what the curriculum was going to be, right?

Fiksdal: You just got it all.

Alexander: And it was going to be fruit-basket upset every . . .

Fiksdal: . . . yeah.

Alexander: . . . every semester, every quarter. They had to have equipment ready to go that could be checked out by either the faculty or the students.

Fiksdal: Oh.

Alexander: So I think we must have been meeting in such a room. But it wouldn't have been because Al Wiedemann was . . . see, you have a strange bunch of people that we were all interested in more than just one thing.

Fiksdal: Of course.

Alexander: Right. And he had lots and lots of interests, including his own interests that his girlfriend at the time—

Fiksdal: Lorraine Marshall?

Alexander: Lorraine Marshall, she was interested in teaching languages, and teaching English and teaching all these things. And her enthusiasm for this sort of thing bled over to Al. He and she talked about everything together. She's the one who came up with the geoduck.

Fiksdal: No, I didn't know that.

Alexander: You didn't know that?

Fiksdal: No, and she's a friend. I didn't know that.

Alexander: Oh, Lorraine, you need to get the story of that.

Fiksdal: I thought it was Al, actually.

Alexander: No, Lorraine did it.

Fiksdal: But it was Lorraine. Oh, I see.

Alexander: It was Lorraine. I mean, it's got her sense of humor all over it. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Oh, that's really funny. I'll have to call her up.

Alexander: Yeah, by all means. I didn't know she was in Olympia.

Fiksdal: Not now. When she didn't get hired, she went back to Australia.

Alexander: That's what I thought.

Fiksdal: Yeah. And she worked at Murdoch University, which was a very different kind of university for Australia also. And her specialty became looking at how students learn, and helping them in that process, and she actually has a really nice book out that she's republished many times. And then she has materials that I gave to the Washington Center, but it's materials on how to work in groups, all this really great stuff that Evergreen wasn't willing to hire anyone for, to our great detriment.

Alexander: Mm-hm.

Fiksdal: But in her last year or two, they promoted her to professor, so that was pretty great.

Alexander: Okay, it's time for us to quit.

Fiksdal: We'd better stop, yeah.

End Part 3 of 3 of Richard Alexander on 12-7-16