

Earle McNeil
Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal
The Evergreen State College oral history project
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FINAL

Fiksdal: This is Susan Fiksdal with Earle McNeil for his second oral history interview on April 29, 2022. I wanted to start with a discussion about your amazing woodworking. I brought a piece for you to see today.

McNeil: It is an amazing piece. I didn't remember this.

Fiksdal: It is gorgeous.

McNeil: Fortunately, it has my initials on it, so we know it's mine.

Fiksdal: Yes, I was pretty sure it was yours. It's a cake stand that's made out of the most beautiful maple. I bought it from Earle years and years ago. He showed me his initials on the back, so now we know it's authentic, and also, he's in love with how it looks. We're both very pleased.

Earle, how did you start your career in woodworking? Talk to us about the mace at Evergreen.

McNeil: Starting a little earlier here. My father was a college professor, but he also was a lot of hands-on kinds of things, as was his father. I grew up in a household in which there was a lot of stuff made, including [that] my dad contracted with a housebuilder that was adding an addition onto our house, and worked with him, and taught me a lot about carpentry. That's where I started out was carpentry.

In high school, among other things, I got a major in industrial arts, which was house design and furniture building. That was the kind of thing I did then.

I didn't do any lathe-turning until a few weeks after my acoustic neuroma surgery. I had been building some furniture for the house over the years, just for us, but not much else. I wasn't sleeping at night, so fortunately, Doug Hitch, who was the head of the woodshop, was a close friend of ours. For reasons I don't know, I asked him if I could borrow the key to the woodshop so I could go up there in the middle of the night and do stuff. Amazingly enough, he said yes.

Fiksdal: I am surprised he said yes. [laughter] That was his bailiwick.

McNeil: From 11:00 at night until maybe 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, I was in the shop. This is part of the story I just wrote [for my family], it's so amazing to me. I walk into the shop, and I pick up a block of walnut. I've done metal lathe before when I was in high school, but I didn't do any woodworking on a

lathe. I put the wooden block in the lathe, I picked up the lathe tools, and I just intuitively knew how to do it. It was just there. I turned out a rather nice walnut vase in the middle of the night in my recovery.

What I found out somewhere in there [was] that my grandfather was an accomplished wood turner. In fact, I have a couple pieces of his. I could show you later if you're interested. But he was not trained either. He was a math teacher in high school. He would go into the high school shop after school and turn these wonderful, wonderful things out. My dad did a little bit also.

My grandfather would pick up these salvaged walnut logs that were taken down for their burls to make gunstocks from, and then he would salvage the rest of the walnut. That's what I've been doing. I use salvaged wood, and that was what I did there. All of a sudden, I was telling Sue this, and she said, "Wow, your grandfather is living in you. His spirit and his love and his skills are still there."

Fiksdal: Do you have any memory of watching him use the lathe?

McNeil: I never saw him do that. I watched him and Dad do rebuilding of the old farmhouse and things like that. I never saw either of them actually doing woodturning, although I have some pieces of his. I never thought about that at that time. It never would have dawned on me until a long time after that.

That's how I got started in the woodturning. Then Sue and I went to New York to the Museum of Modern Art. Sue had bought me a metal kaleidoscope as a gift for Christmas, and when I was in New York, I saw another kaleidoscope in the museum there. Because I've got this physics and chemistry background from college, I knew about the physics of the kaleidoscopes, and I knew about the polarized light—that I don't have to get into at the moment—I thought these two kaleidoscopes had really interesting things that were very different, and I could put them together and produce a new kind of kaleidoscope from that merger.

I started not doing woodturning. I just used cardboard tubes with cloth on them. But at some point—1983, '88, somewhere in there—Paul Sparks and I were teaching. This is one of these examples where I learned from somebody else. The way Paul and I set up the program was that it was a two-quarter program. For one quarter, I would do all the teaching and he would be my student. For the next quarter, he would do all the teaching and I would be his student. We did run our separate seminars and those kinds of things, but we were one of the students.

Fiksdal: But you gave each other time.

McNeil: And I was teaching the students woodworking in the shop. They did some amazing, amazing things as part of that quarter that I was teaching. I was trying to figure out how to drill a hole down through a block of wood to make a kaleidoscope. Paul said All you really need to do is just cut some strips and taper them and make a hexagon out of them, and you've got the hole automatically there, so

my early kaleidoscopes were hexagonal kaleidoscopes. There's a piece that was learning from Paul's just looking at my work and making suggestions. That's when the kaleidoscopes really took off.

Fiksdal: That's so interesting, because he was so used to 3-D thinking.

McNeil: Yeah, so it evolved enormously since then over the last 40 years, 35 years. From time to time, a bit of the programs that I taught, that was working as a four-credit component in it. I've done some of that over the course of time. There was a point for several years, those kaleidoscopes up there [points].

Fiksdal: Those are yours?

McNeil: Those two kaleidoscopes up there are part of a series that a friend of mine collaborated on.

Fiksdal: They're amazing.

McNeil: He did the glasswork inside. I did all the woodworking. Those were selling on the East Coast for \$1,900, \$1,800, and we did two styles. A series of 25 each. I was making more money building kaleidoscopes—we had national galleries—than I was teaching, so I would take spring quarter off without pay for two or three years in a row and just make kaleidoscopes.

Fiksdal: Because you also enjoyed it.

McNeil: I enjoyed making kaleidoscopes and it was a break from teaching. Teaching, for me . . . [sighs] . . . it was never my chosen profession, in a way. I mean it evolved organically with all my family on my dad's side being teachers. And living in a college community, it was about the only thing I knew, although at one time, I wanted to be a fireman. But with my loss of hearing and everything, there were a lot of jobs I would have liked to—I would have liked to have been a pilot, for example, and I took pilot's training and all that. But being a teacher, I could hear well enough back in the old days [laughing] that I could do that.

To me, there's so much energy in teaching, it kind of disappears into a black hole someplace. You don't really know a lot of what the outcome is. I really felt that I needed some right-brain kinds of creative activities to balance that. Because when I'm working on the lathe, for better or worse, at every moment I can see exactly what the outcome is.

Fiksdal: I can see that.

McNeil: So, it's the balance between the intellectual academics of teaching and the right-brain, creative art of the woodworking—or gardening, for that matter.

Fiksdal: Yeah, that makes sense. How did you happen to be chosen to create the Evergreen mace?

McNeil: I don't know the timing exactly, but I had made an arrangement with Byron Youtz that I would make things for each retiring faculty member as a gift that Byron was paying for, for paid work. But what I would do was I would interview, quite extensively—like you're doing right now—each of the

faculty members I was to make something for and make something for them that represented their teaching history and their personality.

Fiksdal: Wow.

McNeil: I did that for quite a few years, actually. Also, a couple of the college Presidents—and I'm not sure exactly when that started—Byron hired me to make kaleidoscopes in a box that would go on a desk that the President was giving to big donors to the college. They were paying for those, so I was making a bunch of those. Somewhere along the way, I don't know who started the idea of making a mace, but it was certainly Byron who approached me and said, "We would like to make a mace. Can you think of what you could do?" So, I did.

Fiksdal: You created all the symbolism?

McNeil: Yeah, it was entirely my own decision about what to do and how to do it. How could I do something that represents the best of what I think Evergreen represents? So, I designed it both with a European and a Native American combination of things. The crown at the top is the European piece, which got me in trouble a few years later. [laughing] We can talk about that. But the mace is the four colors for the four directions in Native American life. If you read the description of it, you'll find that built into the design. [The mace is in a glass case in the Admissions Office and has a plaque detailing the design.—sf]

The other piece was I really wanted to capture Evergreen's history in a very special way, so the crown of the mace is hollow, and there's a glass vial in there. The idea was that every year, one of the graduating seniors would write one page about what the most important events were that had occurred at Evergreen during that year and have that microfiche to put into there.

Fiksdal: It's a time capsule.

McNeil: Then, 10 years after that one was done, some senior would take it out and have it put back into hard copy and read what had been the highlight of Evergreen 10 years before. Unfortunately, Arnaldo [Rodriguez] had absolutely no interest in doing that at all, so it never happened.

Fiksdal: Oh, really? One person decided that.

McNeil: That was absolutely the most disappointing thing that I'd ever had experience in at Evergreen..

Fiksdal: That's very disappointing. And I'm a little surprised.

McNeil: Because he didn't feel that he wanted to put that burden on anybody, I guess, or that they wouldn't write anything significant. I don't know. He absolutely stonewalled that.

Fiksdal: The woodworking has continued, and I assume you're still doing it?

McNeil: Oh, yeah. Right now, I'm just finishing a run of six kaleidoscopes and several bowls. This was last week. My shop is a mess. I just finally got things swept up a little bit this morning.

Fiksdal: Are you still selling the kaleidoscopes?

McNeil: I have kaleidoscopes at two galleries right now, Childhood's End downtown, and a brand-new gallery that opened up in Yelm, oddly enough, little town that it is. She's really starting to try to do something special down there. There's a lot of rather fancy, expensive homes being built in the Yelm area. It's growing very, very rapidly. She's feeling that there's a future at least there for some pretty high-level work.

Fiksdal: I'm glad to hear that.

McNeil: They've got a nice gallery started just within the last year or two. So those two places. Other than that, everything that I'm doing now, I'm either giving away as gifts for almost everybody, or I am doing it for fundraisers for social service and charity groups. I've got several pieces now that will be in the auction for the Children's Museum in June.

Fiksdal: That's terrific.

McNeil: Let me just pick those up. I've got one more piece to go to them.

Fiksdal: Sounds like you're really quite busy with that work.

McNeil: It goes in spurts. [laughing] I get to a point where, oh, I'm so tired of this. I don't even want to look at this stuff anymore. Maybe I should sell more of my tools and get on with something else. Then Sue says, "No, you don't do that. You always do this. In two months, you'll be back out there like crazy again, obsessed with stuff."

People give me wood from all over town. I'm known all over town that I belong to the Thurston County Woodturners. There's always trees that are being taken down. This last year, for some reason, in this neighborhood, there were four or five different species of trees. They're just marvelous. Maple, oak, birch, dogwood.

Fiksdal: Cherry? No.

McNeil: And I get these pieces, and I look at them. One of Sue's brothers is a rockhound, so he knows how to look at a chunk of stone and have a sense of what's inside of it. I can do the same thing with a piece of wood. When somebody says, "I'm taking a tree down," or, "I've got something you want to take a look at," I can look at it and get a sense. That's the kind of thing I'm looking for is in your plate there.

Fiksdal: This is an extraordinary piece of wood. I'm so pleased that I bought it. [We're looking at my cake stand.-sf]

McNeil: Kaleidoscopes. I belong to a national kaleidoscope association, so I have some friends that do it professionally. That's their entire income. They do hundreds of kaleidoscopes in a year, but in order to do that, they have to do a run of, say, 100 that are absolutely identical.

Fiksdal: Oh, I see. That's not as much fun.

McNeil: For me, every single kaleidoscope, I have to look at the wood and decide this is what I want to make the kaleidoscope out of. We can look at some of those a little later.

Fiksdal: That'd be great. I'm a little surprised you're not on this weekend's studio tour. You should put yourself on that sometime.

McNeil: Right after I first started making the first wooden hexagonal kaleidoscopes, I was part of a Smithsonian show. The Smithsonian had kaleidoscopes and sold them for a while. I have friends, like I say, who do this professionally, and they do tours. I used to go to the National Kaleidoscope Association meetings—in fact, we had one in Seattle, and I was part of putting it together—but somehow, I just don't have the motivation to do the kinds of things that you have to do to keep going that way. To me, it's the making of the objects rather than trying to get out there and promote myself that's really important.

Fiksdal: I understand that. I think part of Evergreen's philosophy has been to devote yourself to something. In our case, it was teaching, and teaching was the important thing. The people that were attracted to Evergreen were people who did not want to publish or perish, who were sick of that world, and we got a lot of people in their mid-forties who really wanted out, and they helped influence a lot of the way Evergreen was formed and then kept going. Although, I have to say, after getting my PhD, I did do research, and I enjoyed writing and then seeing it, so I understand your [point of view].

McNeil: I did a couple sabbatical leaves and I did a complete write-up from those, too. That was fine. I did sabbatical leaves on things I really was interested in. I did a very large research piece when I was at the University of Puget Sound on middle-class juvenile delinquency. Again, it's one of these things, I never went out and got it published, but I did give a presentation of it after I got it finished.

Fiksdal: I'm sure you drew on that study in your teaching, too.

McNeil: Yeah, it helps.

Fiksdal: Going back to the folks you taught with, you had mentioned how Marilyn Frasca influenced a couple of beautiful plates that I just saw, and Paul Sparks' influence in helping you with thinking about design of your kaleidoscopes. Are there other faculty that you taught with whose ideas or disciplines influenced you in your teaching? [When Paul and I were teaching together, his quarter was teaching photography. He really made a great difference in the quality of my seeing photographically-EM]

McNeil: Absolutely. The most significant one in that sense was David Whitener. I taught with David in the Native American program either two or three different times. There was supposed to be one time when he and Rainer Hasenstab and I were to do it together, and David got quite ill, so here are these two white guys, Rainer and me, teaching in the Native American Studies program.

But fortunately, the Native American Studies program was not about Native American history. It was the philosophy—the philosophy of teaching, the philosophy of relating, the philosophy of association, of support. Because Rainer and I were already on the left end of education anyway, we fit very nicely.

We'd taught with David twice already anyway, so we already had the sense of how the program was structured, how it ran, how we were to associate with students, students with us, all of that. It wasn't exactly that we were flying by the seat of our pants. But David definitely, with the Native American philosophy of support and relationships, it just fit very much with what I had already been playing with for a long time in terms of my own teaching style.

Fiksdal: And, in fact, your own discipline, because you made up the social psychology degree that you had. Now, it's a discipline, but it wasn't then. Maybe I'm leaping.

McNeil: In terms of my education or the way I created it for Evergreen? Because I created it for Evergreen.

Fiksdal: I'm interested in how you created it for Evergreen. I was talking only about your education because I know that part.

McNeil: I made up my own educational—I started off as a physics major. I was a science nerd—a total science nerd—and I ended up with this funny undergraduate bachelor of science in general physical science. I'd switched to chemistry by that time because I couldn't handle the math in physics, although physics is still my first love.

But my degree technically is in general physical sciences—chemistry—but I also ended up, because I found it very easy to do, with a minor in sociology. If you want to look at it realistically, I was going for a pre-med major. I was thinking of being a doctor at that time, so everything I did was the advanced introductory classes in zoology, bacteriology, chemistry—all the way through chemistry—all of that pre-med kind of stuff.

But then, as I hit my master's, chemistry wasn't doing it for me. I find chemistry interesting, but not really that intriguing in terms of actually doing the research. I did find—and this is a piece you may or may not want to include—that I was asking some very serious questions about my own personality and my own behavior, psychologically and sociologically, because I was a thief. I told my students this

so there's nothing secret about this. It's part of what I teach. It's who I am, and this is where I came from. I was a thief through most of my adolescence, but I was a very clever thief. I did everything on my own. I did everything very carefully. Never get caught.

Fiksdal: Did you steal things you really wanted, or just things?

McNeil: I stole things that I really wanted. I always had enough money. It wasn't a matter of not being able to pay for it. I only stole from mostly businesses where I knew that it was just part of their trade. There was a certain amount of stuff being stolen, so why not me? It was easier for me to steal something that I wanted, and if I had the money for something else, I'd have money for something else.

But it was curious to me why I was doing this, because I certainly didn't grow up in a household where this was okay. It's certainly nothing that my parents would have been happy about at all. So, going into sociology and psychology, an important part was motivated by trying to understand my own self.

I'm sorry to say that I found enormous numbers of rationalizations, which was what my research that I did at the University of Puget Sound was all about: middle-class juvenile delinquency. There's a whole sociological philosophy about the rationalizations for people's behavior, which is really quite interesting, so I explored that at depth.

Fiksdal: I assume you grew out of your . . . ?

McNeil: Mostly. [laughter] After I got married, it was very clear that it wasn't something I wanted to get caught for and eventually, I might, so there were some motivations. I look at it as an addiction. That's my specialty, after all, is addiction and recovery, and I see addiction in a very broad sense.

Fiksdal: It had to be a thrill to get away with it.

McNeil: Well, it wasn't even a thrill.

Fiksdal: It wasn't even that?

McNeil: It was just, okay, I want this. I know how to get it. Take it, and nobody will even know that it's gone. They certainly won't know that I've got it, so I've got it. It was total flat. It's just what I do. It was a little bit embarrassing, I suppose, to me as I got older, but like most addicts, if they're going to recover, something has to happen in their life that is enough superior to that behavior that it stops that behavior from happening. Getting married and having children was what it was for me.

Fiksdal: That's very interesting. So, you talk to your students about it. Getting back to your teaching, were you able to talk to your students about it when your colleagues were present?

McNeil: I don't know.

Fiksdal: That sounds so personal to me.

McNeil: I wasn't trying to keep it secret. For me, after I taught at the University of Puget Sound for four years, and I was teaching the most standard core classes in sociology, including criminology, social psychology, introductory sociology and family—but it was strictly academic, out of textbooks kinds of stuff, standing up and lecturing three hours a week for each of these classes—I made a decision when I came to Evergreen that I wasn't going to teach anything that I didn't personally have some identity to; that I knew I was talking about something honest.

The one thing I did at the University of Puget Sound to get close to that was that when I was teaching a social problems class, after the first year or so, instead of my just standing up and lecturing about prostitutes and drug addicts and thieves and so forth, I wanted the students to have real-life experiences. Not that I was going to take them out and have them steal things. [laughing]

So, I made arrangements to schedule one of the sorority chapter rooms, which were very large, well-decorated lounges, where I could have my students meet, and I would get three or four people that represented the particular area that I was going to lecture on during that week, and the people would come in and they would sit in the four corners of the room. I would do a half-hour lecture about the topic, and then I would have the students go and sit with these people. The students were free to exchange who they talked to, questions they asked, and these people knew they were going to be asked very serious questions.

It worked beautifully. What kind of got me in trouble was that I had decided that as long as I had students that were there all the time, I would ask them what grade they thought they deserved. Most of them deserved As and Bs. Right? So, my grade curve was very high, which upset my departmental chairman to no end, because students were coming to my classes. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Flocking to your classes.

McNeil: It's probably one of the reasons, though probably not the final reason, they decided I probably didn't need to be there anymore. I would say the main reason was that they were keeping us for four years.

Fiksdal: That sounds like the main reason, because you were going to become expensive.

McNeil: They didn't want to give us tenure.

Fiksdal: No, they didn't want one more tenured person.

McNeil: They didn't want a tenured person doing this kind of stuff. After all, I was the same age as my students at that point. [laughing] I was only about 25.

Fiksdal: When you came to Evergreen, I think we were all attracted to Evergreen because of the theories that were being talked about so much and explained to all of us in various ways. Then probably

we all just did whatever we wanted. I feel like we were doing the same thing. I studied seminars, and people were seminar-ing all over the place, except in the sciences, but that was happening. I think this notion of the student being at the center and that we were more peripheral—more as guides, mentors—that, I think, in the early years, was true.

I was wondering, what about that philosophy struck you and remained with you? One, you've already said to me—this was strong in my early formation at Evergreen as well—that we were supposed to do what the students were doing. We were supposed to be co-learners. I have to say, that dropped off after a while, when some things were really hard for me.

I couldn't learn computer programming, for example, and I didn't care enough to do it, so I did give up on a couple of things. But mostly, I tried. Your experience with Paul Sparks was amazing. I was just wondering where that happened? Do you remember certain parts of this philosophy and how . . .?

McNeil: As I said last time we talked, my introductory . . . what do you call it when you have to write something up to get a job?

Fiksdal: Your c.v.? Your resume?

McNeil: Yeah, your resume. For Evergreen, as you know, we had to give our philosophy of education. I was really out there on the left then. For me, historical education is a big business. It's there to try to make money, although the money goes mostly to the administrators and a little bit to the faculty. But it was producing a product - the students, and I wrote all of that up when I gave it to Charlie [McCann] and the deans who were doing the hiring at the time.

The whole idea of the students being the center of their own learning and being able to control a lot of what went on, and to have an education that wasn't an academic book-learning education. But to the degree that we used books, which we used a lot, obviously, it had to do with the personal discussion of what those books were about, and their meaning to the students, both personally and educationally. That's always been with me.

Fiksdal: So, you moved away from the textbooks that you had been using?

McNeil: Right. I don't know if I ever used textbooks again once I came to Evergreen. We'd read a lot of books, but a lot of them were autobiographical material, a lot of historical material, a lot of novels. Greg Portnoff and I wanted to use through the whole quarter just a series of science fiction novels called *Ender's Game*, which is very intense in terms of what happens to the human species once they encounter an alien species they're in a war with, and how do we deal with that?

To me right now what's happening in Europe [Ukraine war—sf] is almost like two species, that is to say Putin and his attitude. I'm afraid we're going to have a nuclear war here before we get done. If

we get through this year, I think we'll be really lucky. It's almost like two species in conflict, and neither of them can see the other one's side. There's no compromise.

Fiksdal: It's especially ironic when they share so much culture, folklore, languages are close. All of that.

McNeil: That concerns me a lot. I wanted to have an education in which the students were very personally involved. Greg and I never did pull that one off. We thought about it very seriously.
[laughing]

Fiksdal: Oh, you planned it, but you didn't do it. I see.

McNeil: We thought about it very seriously. We could have done it. Evergreen was always open. I never ran into a conflict of wanting to do something and being told I couldn't. I always put things together. At faculty meetings, I never had a problem with anybody in a faculty team. There's some faculty members who are maybe not doing their entire job, but as far as interpersonal relationships, I also managed to do well.

Fiksdal: You're very lucky. I had one difficult program, but everything else was fine.

McNeil: I had to end up writing the evaluations for one faculty member for his students. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Oh, no. That's horrible.

McNeil: He left Evergreen without finishing the job. During the year, there was no issue.

Fiksdal: What about some of those faculty who left? Do you remember very many of them? Like the one you just talked about?

McNeil: There's a funny little piece to this. I don't know if you remember this. You've been here essentially as long as I have and you lived in town, so you knew Evergreen was coming into being before anything happened. In the early years, by and large, the faculty who left under fire were minority faculty. Several. [Darrell Fair?]. I think Jose Arguiles. I think he stayed for a long time.

Fiksdal: I don't think he left under fire, did he?

McNeil: I don't think Jose got fired.

Fiksdal: I think he got snatched up.

McNeil: Yeah.

Fiksdal: Cruz Esquivel is one.

McNeil: Yeah, Cruz. When Evergreen Parkway was done and the road behind the school—which I can't remember the name of now—and the entryway wanted to be named, I proposed the names of all the faculty who had been fired. [laughter]

Fiksdal: Charlie Lyons must have gotten fired.

McNeil: That didn't go over very well. [laughing]

Fiksdal: He wasn't a minority.

McNeil: Because I felt those faculty members were teaching some very significant things, which they were teaching from a culturally different point of view.

Fiksdal: Right.

McNeil: I can't remember. Sue?

SUE: Yes?

McNeil: Who was the Central American faculty member that we stayed friends with for a long time—no, maybe it was one of the Native American faculty members—who was taking on contracts and doing all sorts of things with students well beyond what he was supposed to be doing?

SUE: It wasn't Medardo?

McNeil: No, it wasn't Medardo. Medardo Delgado was another one who got fired because Medardo had to do with the Evergreen farm.

Fiksdal: That's right.

McNeil: He wanted to plow. Was it [Darrell?]

SUE: [Darrell Fair? 00:39:00]. No, that doesn't seem right. Again, who was the black guy who was doing—he didn't have his PhD or something?

McNeil: Maybe that's who I'm thinking of.

SUE: He was an ex-con.

Fiksdal: Oh, Jim.

SUE: Jim?, was it?

McNeil: He was teaching really good stuff.

Fiksdal: I can't remember his last name but Jim, but he was an ex-con. He taught with an attorney, a lawyer.

SUE: Right.

Fiksdal: Whose name is escaping me right now, but he was a friend of mine. Hap Freund. But I heard later that Jim had actually stolen from the college. Perhaps it was program budget money. I don't know about that story.

McNeil: I don't know about that story.

Fiksdal: I don't know, but I was really sorry when he left. He was the nicest person. I talked to him all the time.

McNeil: The students loved him. Just loved him. And I know—quite aside from the theft possibility—as a fact that he got into a lot of trouble with the administration because he kept taking students on as

contract students. He would end up with 25, 30 students. They'd say, "You can't take any more students." But if somebody came to him and really had something they wanted to do, and he was able to give it to them, he would take them on, so he kind of violated a rule.

Fiksdal: That seems like—we had so many [faculty] that did the opposite that we needed him all along. [laughing]

SUE: Right, and I think they used that as—there were faculty—I saw a lot when I was [a staff member]—that were using money that was very inappropriate, but what can you say? We don't have any power.

McNeil: Something that a white guy like me might have been able to get away with. But they were getting rid of minority faculty.

SUE: Right and left.

McNeil: Every year.

SUE: Of course Dumis got fired, but then Dumis [Maraire] deserved to get fired. [laughing]

Fiksdal: I remember Dumis. He was African.

SUE: Yeah.

Fiksdal: I didn't know he got fired, actually. People sometimes just left, and you don't know.

SUE: Right, I don't know that he got fired. I just think they didn't renew his contract. But he went off out of town.

McNeil: But Dumis went on to be the Secretary of Cultural Arts for Zimbabwe. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Amazing.

SUE: I took the Bill Brown and Dumis's class on African history way back then.

Fiksdal: What was Dumis's last name?

SUE: Maraire or something like that. It started with an M.

Fiksdal: I just didn't recall it. Thank you.

SUE: But we had an actual African goat roast here.

McNeil: Slaughtered the goat right out on our back porch.

SUE: They slaughtered it. They made goat stew, one of his wives. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Isn't that something?

SUE: He had a couple wives, but one of his wives, we went out and picked pumpkin blossoms out of the garden. It was quite a festive occasion. All in our back yard.

Fiksdal: That's wonderful. Thank you.

McNeil: I always have made a statement that some people really bristle at. I believe that every white person is racist. It's built in. It's baked into our lives, into our culture. It's just there. You can't help it.

You can do an awful lot to minimize the way you react, but some issues of fear, some issues of—I'll give you an example. Our daughter is African American. In high school, if she and a group of students—and she was the only black kid in the class—were standing near the door when class is supposed to start and they didn't come in right away, and maybe there was a little bit of laughter, the teacher would always say, "Kerri, you and your friends need to get in here."

Fiksdal: Singling her out.

McNeil: She was just a little bit darker.

Fiksdal: There is, of course, a lot of research on that in the schools.

McNeil: She was a little bit darker, you know. There was an amazing program I don't know if you ever watched, *Survivor*, on TV. It was a program where people were on an island together.

Fiksdal: I didn't watch that.

McNeil: Usually, it's mostly white folks, but this time, they had four African American people in their group of survivors. They were being voted out, one after the other. And when two of them were left and two of them got voted out in a row, and it was real clear that the other two were going to go—they were going to get voted out. They came on. It was so beautiful. "We're not calling anybody racist, but the fact of the matter is if we do something just a little bit wrong"—and women have this all the time. You talked about your history at Evergreen. All the time, if you do something just a little bit wrong compared to a white male, you get nailed.

Fiksdal: That's right.

McNeil: And that's what was happening at Evergreen.

Fiksdal: You have to be better. And you have to think about it at all times.

McNeil: You have to.

Fiksdal: In the '80s, I was on the Hiring Committee, and it was after I had come back with my graduate work in linguistics. We were looking at candidates, trying to decide which of the candidates were going to come to the campus. I made a little speech. [laughing] I was just so fed up with so many things. I talked about [Erving] Goffman's approach to performance. I said, "Let's look at these candidates one more time, thinking through your notes, thinking through what jumped out at you, and think about performance of self, and try and realize that what you are really wanting is yourself. You want someone like you who's gone through maybe the traditional kinds of schools you have"—or, we had staff always on those committees. "Let's just imagine a different world where people can stand out because of who they are."

We hired more people of color that year. They didn't all make it because it wasn't a welcoming community, as you know. But that little speech worked. I could say it much more clearly then, but I think it was just so helpful for people to realize that so often, you just think, "Oh, Yale! Great! Let's get him!" It has nothing to do with—

McNeil: It was the same with the students. Evergreen made a big push to try to get students of color for several years. The only thing that saved our ass, in a way, was that we had the Tacoma Campus with Maxine and Joye and a couple of other people going up there. Because when we brought the black students to our campus, their educational history and their behavioral history was just enough different from the white students, they couldn't make it on our campus. Even though we tried to give some special help, it was white people doing it.

Fiksdal: That's right. We didn't have enough people of color on the campus.

McNeil: We didn't know what we were doing.

Fiksdal: In staff or faculty positions.

McNeil: It was really, really hard on those black students to be on our campus.

Fiksdal: I agree.

McNeil: It just wasn't—

Fiksdal: And Olympia itself, as you've pointed out, wasn't very welcoming at all. It's been a huge problem, and it still is, actually.

We knew Evergreen more when it started, and we worked really hard, and we carried out most of those philosophical traditions for a long time. Evergreen has really changed now, and I know that you're aware of some of those changes. I'm just wondering if you have any suggestions or advice to give to Evergreen now?

McNeil: We've gone culturally—not just Evergreen but the American culture—through several stages of evolution since Evergreen opened, so Evergreen, and [the] Evergreen style of fulltime, full-year, full faculty, student seminar, hands-on kinds of stuff made perfect sense in the early '70s.

Fiksdal: Face-to-face. Right.

McNeil: Young students who had come from the East Coast and were here to live their education, and we lived together in all sorts of ways, in their education and in ours. We had to learn from the seat of our pants, too, as faculty.

But as we moved through the eras, somewhere in the middle, we came to a place—and I'm not quite sure how it evolved—where we evolved all this Parttime Studies stuff. You know about that.

Fiksdal: I helped evolve it. [laughing]

McNeil: I know, so you can tell me . . .

Fiksdal: I'd be happy to explain that to you.

McNeil: . . . why that came about. But that was a relevant and important addition to what we were doing with Evergreen. My understanding, from the outside—because some of the classes in psychology were an important part of that—at least [in the area of psychology, we couldn't provide every year all the pieces that the students needed to get the degree that they need to go on for whatever they were going to do. The only way to deal with that was to have these pieces sitting out there, and those of us who were teaching a program and didn't have those pieces available, as Heesoon would say, "The deans don't want me to be teaching the same thing all of the time, but I'm the only one that's teaching it. If I don't teach it, the students can't get what they need to go on to graduate school."

Fiksdal: Exactly.

McNeil: So, the Parttime Studies program helped, among other things, fill that out. That was an intermediate stage.

Fiksdal: It was also responding to the fact that we needed to reach out to working adults.

McNeil: That was the other piece I was going to say.

Fiksdal: That has just become bigger and bigger with everybody working. Back when we had students, they weren't working. We could say, "This is a 40-hour program."

McNeil: "We're going to go off to the wilderness for four days."

Fiksdal: You can hear David Marr saying this. And people would go on these long—and I would take students to France. You can't have a job and do that.

McNeil: I took them to San Francisco on the freeway.

Fiksdal: That's right. Things changed.

McNeil: During that period, Bill Aldridge and I taught maybe the only fulltime program that's ever been done. It was called Adult Life Education. It was specifically for people coming back to college after having been out of college for a long time.

Fiksdal: No, it wasn't the only one, Earle. I taught in a program and worked with other women for women to come back because they were uncomfortable coming back, I guess. I don't quite remember it. But we taught women half-time in the evenings. This was before Parttime Studies.

McNeil: We were teaching them how to be students again. [laughing] They were well-educated people in their professions.

Fiksdal: Yes, exactly.

McNeil: So that's where we had to start.

Fiksdal: Somehow, we were aware.

McNeil: Yeah. Getting to study books, to read, to be in seminars. It was all brand new, so we had to start slow and easy. It worked pretty well. That was a really important middle part.

The other thing that happened is the younger students more and more wanted to make their own decisions about what they wanted to do in ways that even though my educational philosophy initially was really open, I still felt that I had some sense of how things ought to happen. There were students that I got into more conflict situations with in the last couple years that I was teaching that simply didn't want to do what I wanted to do. They would be angry about all sorts of things, and they'd take it out in class; take it out on one another or they'd take it out on me.

Fiksdal: This was in the '90s?

McNeil: This would have been the late '90s, '95 to '99. I remember the worst case that I ever knew about wasn't my case, but Paul Sparks had a student who tried to light him on fire with a newspaper. [laughing]

Fiksdal: Oh, my gosh! I never heard that. In class?

McNeil: In class.

Fiksdal: He got so angry with him?

McNeil: He came after him with a lighted newspaper. I don't know what the issue was. I had a couple of students I did contracts with who just simply weren't able to talk to me about what they were doing, so when we got to the point of my having to do an evaluation, I'd have to say, "You know, you did this well, but you could have avoided that." And they'd be so angry. "You don't tell me how I was supposed to... Well, I tried.

I had one student who was working for one of the big department stores in Tacoma on an internship, and when he finally got all done and he wrote his self-evaluation, what he'd learned, one of the things I said to him was, "It sounds like a PR piece for the company. I'm a social psychologist. I expected you to be able to dig under the surface, like an ethnographer." That's what I expected him to be was an ethnographer.

Fiksdal: Exactly.

McNeil: And to get some idea of what was happening in terms of how the business was dealing with addictions, with mental illness, with physical illness of their employees and the employees' families. That's what it was supposed to be about, what was it like to be a member of this business in the kind of low-level of administration.

He just didn't do it, and he was so angry, he challenged it. He took me to Larry Stenberg, who was dean at the time, and Larry did a—what do you call it when two people have an intermediary trying to get them to negotiate?

Fiksdal: I can't remember this second either what it's called, but I did that myself as a dean.

[Mediation—sf]

McNeil: When I finally got done and wrote this guy an evaluation, it was actually more damning than the original. [laughing]

Fiksdal: I would have just withdrawn a lot of credit.

McNeil: I didn't want to, necessarily. I tried to be kind the first time.

Fiksdal: Right.

McNeil: But the second time, I just said, okay, I'm just going to say it straight out. I had another student, a Jewish student. At the start of the school year, we were going to go to that place in Shelton that we used to go to—a YMCA camp or something—for a few days.

Fiksdal: For our retreats?

McNeil: Yeah. We were going to go there for two days as a program to get people doing things together, do seminars together, get to know one another. It happened to be during Rosh Hashanah. She said she couldn't do it because she had to take one of the days for meditation. I said, "It's okay. We're going to have plenty of time for people to do self-contemplation and all of that, but if you just can't do it, I think you'll miss a lot because there will be a lot of things going on there where people get to know one another."

Next day, the President of the college—I don't remember who was President at the time—called me at home one evening. He said that the student's father had called him to tell him that I had told his daughter that she couldn't be in my program if she didn't come; that my anti-Semitism was just unthinkable." I said, "I didn't have a problem with it. I'm Jewish." [laughing]

Fiksdal: I didn't know you were Jewish.

McNeil: I said "I think there's some miscommunication going on here." She left the program. She actually came to my office a couple days later, I guess to sign out—I don't remember why—and I said, "I'd like to talk to you about that. I never intended for you to have to leave the program. I was quite aware of what you needed and wanted to do." She said, "I don't want to do it. You're not a person I want to have to deal with for anything." "Okay." Things like that started . . .

Fiksdal: . . . to happen a little more and more often.

McNeil: It never would have happened in the early days.

Fiksdal: I do think that we never had the support we needed for students who needed counseling. Quite possibly, they had mental health issues that were undiagnosed, or we couldn't deal with. Those both sound quite strange to me. I feel that part of it is that.

We were talking about Evergreen today. Any advice you have for this period we're in?

McNeil: I wouldn't want to teach now. I'm really happy that I'm retired. Once the students got really angry, and the anger takes place, of being just really negative about all sorts of other people rather than being able to talk with one another and try to find some common ground—because there's always more common ground than there is difference. There may be some difference, but "What can we do to deal with these differences?" Once it no longer was that way, which is what's happening now—fortunately, I was out before any of this happened other than the last three years—I don't know how to deal with that.

Look at our former President. His whole attitude was to be negative and angry at people, and he's still doing it. Trump.

McNeil: That President. I mean, c'mon. He's fed the whole nation on this anger, negativity. "I'm totally 100 percent right and you're totally 100 percent wrong."

Fiksdal: "It's okay to do what I'm doing."

McNeil: I have some friends who are very conservative and sometimes, we can talk a little bit about that. Mostly we just avoid it. When you really get down talking about "What's really important to you? What's really important to me?" you find that underneath, there's that common ground, and there's just some points up here we will disagree with and would like it to happen differently, but we don't need to hate one another.

Fiksdal: Right.

McNeil: But that's what's happening. I don't want to deal with that.

Fiksdal: You see that filtering in also to teaching.

McNeil: Yeah.

Fiksdal: I see that. You had said in your first interview that you taught for 30 years, and you thought that was enough. You've mentioned that teaching was never your first love in the first place. [laughing]

McNeil: Yeah.

Fiksdal: So, you've been doing a lot of work in the community, so I thought maybe you could talk to us a little bit about that.

McNeil: I go back again a little bit into my acoustic neuroma surgery. I was in the hospital for 10 days. I got out, and the first night that we were here in the house, I had the most intense panic nightmare—my

heart was beating so hard that it woke Sue up—that I was a warrior in this battle between the light and the darkness, and I had to somehow be a hero on this side of the light.

The doctor had told Sue that this could happen; that the brain has no pain receptors, but it goes crazy if it's been manipulated through surgery, so sometimes it'll just do weird stuff. Not just dreams, it goes nuts. He said, "Call me anytime this is happening." Sue called in at 2:00 in the morning and he said, "Yeah, I told you it was going to happen. Tell him it's okay. It'll be okay." [laughing]

Fiksdal: That's all he would do?

McNeil: Sue said, "Doctor said this." God, I was so angry. "I'm a psychologist, for god's sake! All you had to do was tell me that this could happen, and I'd have been able to deal with it."

Fiksdal: Well, not necessarily, but you could think about it.

McNeil: I wouldn't have been freaked out by it in the same way that I was at the time. Anyway, the whole point of that story is that ever since then, there's been that image in my head, and this idea of being part of the healing of the earth.

That's where my woodworking comes in. I'm taking dead trees, trees that are being killed, for one reason or another—I don't take them down, for the most part, although a couple needed it in my own yard—but I'm trying to resurrect them, if you will, into something beautiful. So, any piece of tree that anybody gives me, I always give them something back. A finished piece.

That's how I tried to be as a teacher at Evergreen. What can I offer you to be part of the light of your life? When I fail I get miserable about that from time to time, but it's an image. So, when I decided to retire—and I actually started a bit before retirement because one of the last years, when Pris Bowerman and Lucia Harrison and I were teaching together, even though it was a freshman program, we had all our students doing some kind of internship. A couple included the Food Bank.

I had been doing some minor things at the food bank already at that point since 1998, so I already had an association with the food bank. So, when I retired, I decided to work more for the food bank. For some reason, I also got hooked up with the Senior Center doing Meals on Wheels and working their coffee bar. Then I started doing emergency services with the Red Cross, and I'm still doing park maintenance for Olympia Parks and Recreation Department. And my woodworking that I'm now giving away or doing for auctions and so forth. Those are all part of that original image of who I want to be and what I want to bring to the world.ⁱ

I beat myself up over my failures. I see Ralph Nader and I say, gawd, I'm not doing anything compared to Ralph Nader. [laughing] Things like that. Or I look at Colin Kaepernick, who kneels on the

ground, and then he can't get a job being one of the best quarterbacks there ever was, and I'm not doing anything compared to what Colin's had to deal with in his life, but I'm doing the best I can.

Fiksdal: You're not doing things that are highly publicized, but that doesn't mean you're not living a good life. I'm wondering how much of this work that you're doing might reach back to your Jewish faith. I know that you're relating it to this one nightmare, but how much does it relate back to being Jewish and having that faith?

McNeil: [Sighs] I don't know. I was raised in a strange household. My mother was Jewish, and my father was Methodist. My grandparents on my father's side were fairly strict Methodists. My grandparents on my mother's side were kind of ethnic Jewish. [laughing] So, I grew up in this dual religion household.

What I do know, however, less from my mother's side, the Jewish side, but actually from my father's side, the Christian side, interestingly enough, is that my mom and my dad and my grandparents were also always very much in touch with wanting to do good deeds. The one thing I remember multiculturally growing up is, for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, my dad would have the African students—that were his students—come to our house. They had nowhere to go. So, there was a bit of a piece there.

My dad was always volunteering to do things around the neighborhood, and Mom was always very much involved in the activities and taking care of everybody that was around. So, I grew up with that. My sister and my brother are the same way.

Fiksdal: That all connects. You sound really busy. [laughter]

McNeil: Of late, I've slowed down a whole lot in my external activities with the Senior Center and the food bank, partly because of the Covid thing. But even right now, I'm spending a lot more time in my own yard and my own garden. We've got half an acre here. It takes about as much time as we can possibly put into it.

Fiksdal: I know all about that. I'm with you there.

McNeil: But we raise things and we put them out on the street. I've got blueberry bushes. I used to have a garden along the front bank out there with tomatoes, and I had blueberries out there and other kinds of stuff and I wrote a sign: Feel free to take whatever you want. We have a library out there for books.

Fiksdal: I saw your little library.

McNeil: It's bits and pieces. I think that's where the making of the mace came from. It's where making the things for faculty when they retired came from.

Fiksdal: You remind me that the box I received [when I retired] was probably made by you. I have a box that you can only open by sliding. Do you remember making those? And it's got a burnt image of a—

McNeil: The boxes were actually made by a friend of mine, Dale Baird.

Fiksdal: Oh, yeah. I have some of his pieces, too.

McNeil: Dale and I collaborate. In fact, that's a box I made over there.

Fiksdal: Wow, that's a big one. Dale does very nice work. He's gotten a lot better, too, over the years.

McNeil: Oh, yeah. He scares me really at the moment. He's doing these things with 10,000-volt electrical probes. They put them in the top of your wood that's going to be the top of your box, and you turn this transformer on, and it burns chaotic patterns into the top. There was a thing in the paper the other day about somebody that just killed themselves doing that. You want to be really careful because you don't know where the sparks are going to go.

Fiksdal: I usually see him at the market, and I haven't been down there for a little while, so I'll have to go down.

McNeil: Look at his burned-top boxes.

Fiksdal: Yes, very interesting.

McNeil: They're really, really nice.

[I asked if he had kept up with Rita Cooper because I would like to interview her—sf]

McNeil: The only person in Human Resources we kept up with was Charen Blankenship.

Fiksdal: Yeah, she was a friend of mine.

McNeil: Charen was actually a student of mine.

Fiksdal: Oh, she was?

SUE: She's gone now.

Fiksdal: Yeah. She married Ralph Blankenship, who I graduated from high school with.

SUE: Are you doing Tina Kuckkahn-Miller? or anybody from the—

Fiksdal: She's not on my list, but I can check with Sam to make sure she's on our list. She would be very important also to interview.

SUE: She really made the Native American Longhouse and all of that over there, and all of the stuff that they've got. She and Laura. Now, I think Laura's in charge because I think Tina's gone.

Fiksdal: Yeah, Tina's gone.

SUE: Laura Grabhorn—is that her last name?—took over Tina's position, I think. She was assistant for a while. But again, you know it's expanded so far.

Fiksdal: It's been amazing, the work that they've done.

SUE: As a matter of fact, we hadn't been on campus for a long, long time. We went up for somebody's memorial, I guess, and we went over and saw the Carving Studio. We were fortunate because his sister and brother-in-law are in New Zealand and we have been to New Zealand, and gone to the Māoris and the whole bit, and seen all of that. To see the Māori carvings on the Longhouse we thought that was really special.

Fiksdal: Especially because you knew about—and then, with Earle's understanding of woodworking. That's great.

SUE: Evidently, the Weaving Studio—we looked in the window but there was nobody working—

Fiksdal: But that's continued. That's really good to hear that it's continued after Gayle.

SUE: Yeah, I think so. I don't know who's taken it over.

Fiksdal: We paused for just a moment. Earle would like to talk a little bit about Super Saturday.

McNeil: Super Saturday started out in a very different sort of way. The first time it wasn't Super Saturday. What happened was—and again, I don't know who suggested it—somebody said to me, "We really need to have a picnic at the end of the year where the staff and faculty get together." The idea was that we were all part of the same community, and yet, there's this distinctive difference. Staff, faculty and administration are three tiers, and then the students fit in there somewhere.

The very first year, I put together a picnic where the staff and faculty got together. It didn't work out very well. It was just really hard for people to associate with one another, so faculty were in one group and the staff were in another group, and we all sat around the table, and everybody had a potluck. I don't even remember where we were now. But that was the first year.

The second year, somebody said, "That didn't work out so well, so maybe what we should do is have an academic fair. At the end of the year, the programs that have either been researching something, which meant the sciences for the most part, or had some major literary thing where somebody was doing something special that they could do a reading. Those programs would spend several hours in succession, where the sciences would have their microscopes and their chemistry stuff and their biology stuff set up, and people could go through."

We advertised around the community so people would come. After all, Evergreen was in really bad straits in terms of the way the community saw us—that we were a bunch of outsiders that were doing hippie things with dogs pooping in the halls and had all these strange students here. Fortunately, over a great many years, most of the students became people who owned businesses downtown.

[laughing]

Fiksdal: That's right.

McNeil: The town changes everything.

Fiksdal: But it's true that at the beginning, there were hippies.

McNeil: Maybe for two years, we tried that. It kind of worked, but it was kind of boring, and it was really hard for programs when they got done at the end of the year to come up with anything that would really be very exciting, very interesting.

Larry Stenberg said to me at one point, "We just need to have a big party where we advertise it for downtown and do the kinds of things that will bring people here, at least be on campus, and see us, see us doing things and who we are just as people and as a community part of the town."

He put together a group of people, and I was in the core group, and was in that core group for 11 years—maybe longer than that—and I was in charge of arts and crafts. That was my job. After all, I was an artsy and craftsy person, so I was the one who was in charge of getting all of the arts and crafts people there and having them set up. We would come as families, husbands, and wives from this group of eight or 10 people, faculty and staff, and the faculty and staff were working together. Larry was the linchpin of the whole thing.

We would meet starting in early February and would meet more and more frequently as it got on toward the end of the school year. The very first thing early in the morning, we'd get together and have breakfast together, and then we'd go and help set everything up. I did that for as long as Super Saturday existed, as long as I was there. Then Larry got fired.

Fiksdal: Larry Stenberg got fired?

McNeil: Yeah.

SUE: No, he didn't get fired.

McNeil: Well, it depends on how you look at it.

SUE: He didn't get his contract renewed.

Fiksdal: Oh, he just didn't get his contract renewed, but that's the same thing.

McNeil: If it wasn't renewed, what do you call that? You call it getting fired. What happened was that Joe Olander had taken over as President. You've got to remember Larry and I came from the same school. Larry and I and Ted Gerstel all came from the University of Puget Sound. Larry was part of the first administration that existed. He was there before any of us. In the administration, he was one of the very earliest administrators.

After he had been there for 20 years, and never had taken any time off, he finally took a year leave of absence. During that period of time, Gayle Martin was made the Dean of Students or whatever it was that they were down there. Dean of Students. There weren't very many women in the

administration at that time, so Joe decided that since Larry's contract was up, Larry was gone, and Gayle had the job.

Fiksdal: Oh, my gosh!

McNeil: Larry came back from being on leave of absence and he came back with no job.

Fiksdal: He had no idea? No clue?

McNeil: I don't think he really knew what was happening until they told him he wasn't going to be rehired. At that point, we lost the main spirit of the operation. It struggled on for several years with various attempts to get people involved by mostly assigning staff members the job of doing it, which was outside of their normal workload. They were perfectly happy to volunteer as long as we were all doing this as a fun party.

Then it started to get more and more difficult because all of a sudden, you started to have various kinds of licenses for the beer garden, and you had to start worrying about the cost of the liability insurance, and then the campus police and the campus building and grounds started charging for their services, all of which had been volunteered in the early years. It just became unmanageable.

Fiksdal: It was a wonderful time, though.

McNeil: It was. It was very, very large.

Fiksdal: I loved going. I loved taking my kids. I loved getting my palm read. I loved watching the medieval jousts or whatever they were. It was a good time. Lots of good music.

McNeil: I was glad to be a part of that and follow through.

Fiksdal: It's too bad because we don't have anything like that that brings people out to the college. I think that was a brilliant idea. And I'm really sorry to hear about Larry. I didn't know of that. And Gayle never would have wanted that.

McNeil: Things evolve. Things change. You can't expect things to go on forever.

Fiksdal: No.

McNeil: The same thing happened to me. Did you ever go to the Pie Fest downtown?

Fiksdal: No.

McNeil: There was a group of us that got together to have a party to raise money for Senior Services and the food bank. We would have pie contests. We'd have baskets that were donated from stuff from all around town. Then we would have a Saturday, a Pie Day, if it was the first Saturday in March.

Fiksdal: Whatever Pi Day is.

McNeil: We'd have a big party and invite the whole community in. Sell slices of pie. SPSCC, the community college, made 50 pies for us. We had people volunteering making pies. Then we had people

bring pies in for the contest and all of that. It ran for 10 years. But again there was a core person who was the heart and the spirit of that, and after 10 years, she just got tired of doing it. It struggled on for a couple years after that, and then Covid hit. That was the end of that. I don't think it'll ever happen again.

Fiksdal: But that's a good point. It's true. There has to be a motivating, charismatic person.

McNeil: There needs to be a spirit that sits at the pinnacle.

Fiksdal: Thank you for telling me about that. I'm glad to know you were a part of it. And Parttime Studies, I remember being interviewed on the KAOS Radio [during Super Saturday], and I was standing there thinking, what? I can't do this. I was the dean and our PR person at the time said, "This is what your job is, and we need you, and you can do it and you'll be great." Handed me the mic. It was however many people listened to KAOS in the middle of a Saturday afternoon.

But we did whatever we could to attract students because Parttime Studies was not just courses. We did have some courses, but we had halftime, very interdisciplinary programs. In fact, our programs were more interdisciplinary than Evergreen was by then, because people started teaching on their own a lot, people started just teaching with their friends. You could get more things of what you needed for graduate school than—sometimes it depended on the year and how tough the Curriculum Dean was. But it was a welcome addition, I think, to the college.

McNeil: I know I have mixed feelings about certification program that's going on now. Again, I see it as a rather desperate effort to get more students. But then, maybe this is the era we're in. It feels like community college all of a sudden. It doesn't feel like a real university anymore to that extent, but I know how hard it is. I can't imagine the last two years trying to do stuff online. I couldn't have done that.

Fiksdal: The faculty had to take crash courses in how to do it because, of course, we were against it for so long. I think a lot of good things have come out of it because I think people now are more versatile and can do this kind of thing.

McNeil: There are always good things that happen. It's just that old people . . .

Fiksdal: Yeah, it's harder.

McNeil: Like my daughter said about a seven page paper I sent her "You need to print this out. I can't read it on my phone." [laughing]

Fiksdal: I think we always hired Luddites somehow. They were always sprinkled in generationally. [laughing]

McNeil: You think we're finished?

Fiksdal: I think we are.

McNeil: Okay.

Fiksdal: Thank you, Earle.

ⁱ One year I taught two quarters with Craig Carlson and Meg Hunt. A lot of social psych, developmental psych, literature and art. At the start of the program in the fall, I we gave each student a number of narcissus bulbs. We told them we wanted them to serendipitously and secretly plant them in highly visual spots all over campus. But not in the lawns or where they would get trampled. We told them we had a reason for this related to the eventual program ending but would not reveal it until the end of winter quarter. Toward the end of winter, flowers were popping up in some of the most unexpected places. What we evolved in the program was the concept of transition and growth through stages of moral, spiritual, artistic and community connection. We ended the program using the myth of Narcissus and the growth from the egotistical self to adding to community beauty. I don't think many of the flowers are left now but were for several years though for a few years I did add a number of flowers to the big planter on the lower level going into the admissions area, as did someone else. [I include this story because Earle was known for bringing daffodils and leaving them on staff member's desks after he retired. Also, those daffodils in unexpected places were beautiful and such a nice surprise every spring.-sf]