

**Bob Haft**  
**Interviewed by Michael Bowman**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
**July 9, 2021**  
**FINAL**

**Bowman:** We are here today recording for the Evergreen Oral History project. We're interviewing a former Evergreen staff member and faculty member, Bob Haft. It's Friday, July 9, 2021. Thanks for being here and being a part of this project, Bob. We thought we'd start off with just having you talk a little bit about growing up, I think in Walla, Walla, Washington. Significant memories that you have of family, schooling, growing up in Walla Walla.

**Haft:** Okay. I grew up in a big family. I had three brothers and three sisters. That experience has colored my life to a great extent. Having that many siblings, and thinking that was normal, only come to find out that lots of kids were single kids. I just couldn't wrap my head around what it meant not to have a brother or a sister.

That has come to the fore lately because I shared experiences with some of my old classmates and they said, "Why did you ever do that?"—this crazy thing—and I said, "Obviously, you never had older brothers who would goad you into taking any dare that they gave you."

The other thing that was significant was teachers in high school that we had, particularly two English teachers. Both of them were fairly liberal, radical guys to Walla Walla. Walla Walla, as you know, is a farming community. It's fairly conservative still. But these guys really opened my eyes to a different ethos, different way of thinking. The books they introduced us to, and the way they talked about literature, just really had a strong effect on me, which I wasn't aware of, I suppose, until I was a senior in high school. [chuckles]

This is an interesting thing. There was an assembly for Honor Society and one of my best friends was in Honor Society. At that assembly, I was tapped to be in—he came up and physically tapped me on the shoulder—and I refused to go. I just sat there in front of the whole student body. The reason I did was I felt it was an elitist group that I really didn't want to belong to. That was because of this English teacher mainly, Mr. Patterson, who put those thoughts into my head.

It caused a big scandal, believe it or not. You would think the world was going to end or something. I was called into the principal's office and asked to explain why I didn't want to join this

thing. It was just incredibly blown all out of proportion. But I was really happy that my mom was proud of me for doing that. [laughing]

But those two events, I think, were fairly indicative of major influences on my future life. I kept that attitude about non-elitism, even through Evergreen. Evergreen is a good place to have that attitude, I suppose.

You asked in your notes if I had a camera as a kid, and I did not. I was totally disinterested in photography, although I was very interested in vision somehow, and how the eye worked. My father was a chest surgeon, and I was the one, I suppose—my eldest sister wanted to be a doctor, but in those days, it just wasn't an option for women. But I think I was the one that my parents really expected to go to medical school, and I actually thought I would, too, when I went to college.

I started at Gonzaga, but I only was there for half a year, just one semester, after which I transferred to Washington State University, and I stayed there for my undergraduate degree. While I was there, I was thinking of becoming a doctor—going to medical school—but again, I just loved English, and I kept taking these English classes. [laughing]

Then I don't know why, but somebody—I think most of my friends—must have told me to take an art history class, and I did. The teacher of that class became my mentor. His name was Arthur Okazaki. He's still living and he's still a close friend. We did become really good friends, which that was another shocking thing. He was 10 years older than I was, but he treated me as a peer.

When I was a junior, I guess, I became his undergraduate teaching assistant. Maybe it was when I was a sophomore, I can't remember. But I really liked art history, especially the way he taught it. He was a photographer. When I was a freshman, I went into a secondhand store in Pullman, Washington—it was a dinky little town, a little farm town—and I found this box camera for 50 cents, which was this beautiful machine. I bought it because it was cheap, but I also bought it because aesthetically, it was just a beautiful little thing. I still have it.

I started making photographs with it, which were very [chuckles] rudimentary in every aspect, because it only had a shutter. That's all you could do was just click this button. But I kept trying to emulate photographers that I had come to appreciate, like Ansel Adams. I tried to make these landscapes in the Palouse with this box camera and I realized I couldn't do it.

When I was a junior, I wanted to go to France, I guess, because I had taken French since the seventh grade, and the college had a study abroad program, a consortium with the University of Washington, University of Oregon, Oregon State, Idaho and Alaska. All these schools got together, and you applied and then you could go and study in Avignon, France.

My father at that time then gave me his 35mm Kodak camera from the 1930S, which was actually a very lovely machine—it was a beautiful thing—and I started taking photographs seriously when I was in Avignon studying overseas. Film was super cheap and I just kind of went nuts making photographs when I was there, and small Super 8 movies, too.

When I came back to the States, I was in a real quandary because I had really been seduced by art. When I was in France, I just could not get over the fact that art was everywhere. Literally, everywhere. And little kids understood it so much better than I did. They had grown up on it like mother's milk or something. They could talk about art really intelligently, these 10- and 12-year-old kids that were in the family I stayed with.

I came back, and again, I worked with Arthur Okazaki. I also had an undergraduate teaching assistantship in the Psychology Department, so I was in art and psychology both. I still had these notions that I was going to go to graduate school in medicine, and maybe become a child psychologist. I don't know, I was just confused. But I was making photographs madly all the time.

While I was in Avignon—I'd forgotten about this—I made all these movies and I took all this film, and I would take them to this one little photo store. I got to know the guy who owned and ran it, because he would look at my photos when they came through and he liked them, and we'd talk about them. He said, "If you ever want to come back here, I could give you a job."

That was a pretty interesting offer for a 20-year-old kid. So, when I graduated from college, I went back to France. The first thing I did was I worked in harvest all summer to make money, and then a friend and I went back to Europe. His parents were living in Germany, so I stayed with them for a while. Then I went back to Avignon and went to this little store where the guy said he'd have a job waiting for me. Unfortunately, I had spent too long in Germany with this other family because it was so comfortable there. He said that by the time I got there, he'd hired somebody else.

I didn't have a job in this photo store, as I thought I would, and I didn't have any money. I didn't know what I was going to do, so I went to work in a youth hostel that was run by, I'm sure he was an ex-Nazi. He was this German guy living in France. I just did menial labor for him for a while until I figured out, nah, this isn't going to work.

I came back to the United States and enrolled in the University of Washington and decided, okay, I'd better go to medical school. But I needed a year of organic chemistry, and I needed a year of physics, so I did that. I took both of those things, and I did well in both of them. I got straight As in both of those things. This becomes important later, as you'll see.

I was supposed to be studying for the medical school admission test—the MCAT or MSAT or whatever it was—and I just couldn't motivate myself to do it. But what I was doing was going into the darkroom all the time and printing up photographs, because I was still making photographs like crazy.

One of my fellow students from France in Avignon was this young woman, Jean Korchinski, and she was going to the University of Washington, and she was bent on going to medical school, and we were supposed to be studying together. I would just miss the study meetings constantly. She kept saying, "Bob, it's like you really don't want to be a doctor." [laughing] I said, "Yeah, I do, I do, I do. It's just hard to find access to a darkroom, and this guy had one in his house and let me use it."

I took the medical school admission test. I did all right, and I had these interviews to go to medical school. I didn't get into the University of Washington, which is where I really wanted to go, because I didn't really want to go anywhere else. But I was accepted at Loma Linda College in California, and I just didn't want to go there. I was stubborn.

Arthur Okazaki called me, and he said, "Why don't you come back and get a graduate degree in fine arts and kind of get it out of your system?" I said, "Yeah, that's a good idea." [laughing] So, I did. I spent a couple years in Pullman in graduate school in fine arts getting a master's in fine arts. I was totally out of my element. I just didn't have the background that everybody else did. I'm sure I got in—I couldn't have got in based on my application. There's no way. [laughing] I'm sure Arthur Okazaki had to pull some strings and say, "I think this kid can do it."

But I really enjoyed that. I had a great time being there. One of the nice things about Pullman is that isolation. At the University of Washington, there were so many distractions. You could go to a movie easily, you could go to the beach, you could go to the mountains. In Pullman, you can't do anything [laughter] except go to your studio and work. I developed a really strong work ethic in art when I was there.

After that, I kept thinking, well, I'm going to go to medical school. [chuckles] It was still this stupid kind of dream, I guess. But I was offered a job in Northern California at this little college called Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, which was on the East Bay, east of Berkeley and Oakland. The job wasn't a teaching job, but it was a job, and that was the only one I was offered, so I jumped at the chance.

It was running their slide library for the art historian, which involved making slides of artwork, acquiring them, and cataloging them. They let me teach at night, so I taught part-time. I was a part-time faculty member there.

That was an experience, too, that shaped my future, to a large degree, for a number of reasons, one of which was that it was so urban, and I came from a background that was so rural that I just couldn't stand commuting. It drove me nuts to get in the car every morning and have to drive somewhere, and then get stuck in traffic and wait, and same thing on the way home.

To complicate things, the college that I was hired at was a pretty good school, I must say. In those days, community colleges were feeding sources for the UC system. They really were. They were free for two years, and if you did well, you could go to UC Davis or any other place that the UC system had.

But the Art Department there was real split, and this is true in a number of colleges, I've discovered since. There were the artists—the two-dimensional and three-dimensional artists and art historian—and then there was the photography group. The photographers were a real clique—these two guys who taught—and they had this cadre of students. It was a real clique, and I just didn't like it. It rubbed me the same way that the Honor Society did, I guess.

The only reason I was hired there, I found out later, was because I wasn't part of that photo clique. The other candidate—the finalist for the job—had been a protégé of the two photographers who were there. They knew him very well and he knew them. It was a real cozy deal. But the rest of the Art Department, I think, went to the President of the college and said, "Don't let them hire that guy. You need to stop this." I was hired as a strikebreaker, I guess. [laughter]

**Bowman:** Or a clique breaker!

**Haft:** Exactly! The two guys that I worked with were pleasant enough, but they did not want me there. They really did not want me there. I discovered that and felt paranoid because I realized they just wanted me to fail so this other guy could take the job.

I think I mentioned this to you the last time. I don't remember what our talk entailed last time, but if I had been a stronger person, I probably would have started drinking because it was just awful. It really was terrible going to work every day and just feeling paranoid. I had to watch my back, and every move I made, I was afraid that I was making some mistake.

So, I did a photo series based on that called "The Watchers." It was what it felt like to be paranoid, to feel like you're being watched all the time. It was art therapy, in a way. It just was liberating to kind of turn the table on these two guys, I must admit.

I think I told you this. I had a big show at one point. There were like 50 photographs in this circular art gallery that they had, which was windowless. All these images were pictures of people and statues and things looking at you, kind of leering at you suspiciously. I sat outside the door and

watched, and people would go in feeling happy and upbeat, and they'd come out kind of furtive, looking around. I thought, wow, it worked. They got it!

I stuck that out for four years, and then I saw an ad in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I saw an ad in the *Chronicle* for this job at Evergreen. I had heard about Evergreen when I was a graduate student from a fellow graduate student who was English, and he knew more about the college than I did.

He told me, "Bob, there's a school over in Olympia. It's very radical. Their mascot is the geoduck," and he just thought that was hilarious. I didn't even know what one was. That was four or five years earlier I had heard about this place. I'd not really processed it, but it must have gestated in my brain, because when the job came up, I went, oh, I know about this place.

So, I applied for it, and had an interview. The job was not a teaching job. It was a similar job to what I was doing at Diablo Valley College. It was working in the library heading up their slide collection, the same sort of thing that I'd been doing. I jumped at the chance to get back to Washington State, I must admit, because I just didn't enjoy California. I liked going into San Francisco and Berkeley and photographing. That was really fun. I did a lot of that. But it was just too urban for me and too California somehow. [laughing]

I came back for this interview and the guy who interviewed me was named George Rickerson. He worked in the library. I don't remember what his title was, but he was quite high up. He wasn't the dean, but he was the head of Technical Services. I think that's what it was called.

I just took the job really to get away from that situation I had been in, but it was real liberating as well because I felt like I was coming home in a way, coming back to Washington. And there was a promise that I could teach again. I held out for that. That came to fruition within the first year that I was there, I think. They needed people to teach at night.

**Bowman:** Bob, before you move on, can I ask you to put some timestamps on this as well?

**Haft:** Sure.

**Bowman:** What year is this at Evergreen?

**Haft:** I graduated in 1971 with my undergraduate degree. Between 1973 and 1975 was my master's degree. From '75 to '79 was when I was in California, and I started Evergreen on April 1, 1979.

I want to jump back to where I talked about doing well at the University of Washington because when I was applying to medical school, you had to have recommendations from faculty members. The two guys who I felt knew me most were my physics teacher and the organic chemistry teacher that I had. I had had them for three consecutive quarters. I thought I knew them both really well. I sat up in the first row, answered every question, tried to be as obvious and eager student as I could be.

I went into the professor's office who taught organic chemistry to talk to him about getting a recommendation for medical school and he looked me right in the eye and he said, "I don't know who you are, kid." I think I said this before, it was like a punch in the gut. What do you mean you don't know who I am? I've seen you for nine months, almost on a daily basis. I don't know what I had to do to make a stronger impression.

When I got to Evergreen, that became one of the main things that really struck home to me was how I knew my students. I learned their first names the first day of class and made it a point to remember their first names the second day of class. I could call them up if I saw that they weren't in class for some reason, but I'd seen them out on Red Square and say, "Where were you today?" That's a big, big difference between the University of Washington and Evergreen. I've told students that anecdote, too.

**Bowman:** It seems, too, that your earlier experiences—you talked about your high school English teacher, Mr. Patterson, and then later on Okazaki—you had some models there for what good teaching and good teachers looked like—inspirational teachers, relevant teachers—and then here you are with U Dub teachers that don't seem to fit that model.

**Haft:** Yeah, it's true. It wasn't that they were bad teachers, but they just didn't care about you as a student.

This is a sidebar, but one of the things I did at the University of Washington to make money was I was a professional notetaker. My undergraduate degree was in psychology, so I knew psychology, and I had taken some really high-level courses as an undergraduate. As a post-graduate student, I was hired to go into these psych classes at the University of Washington, take notes, come back, type them up, and then they were printed and sold to students in the class, if they wanted. I was a really good notetaker. I can say that without embarrassment. I was really good at it.

One of the professors in the Psych Department was one of the best lecturers I had ever seen in my life. I took notes for him one quarter—it was child psychology—and it was just great. He was so easy to follow.

I think two quarters later, he taught the same class, and I was assigned to take notes in it again, and he was terrible. He was absolutely terrible. The same guy, same class. I couldn't follow him, and it was like, what happened? It turned out that because of the publish or perish ethos at the University of Washington, he was forced to go to all these conferences and do stuff. Then he'd come back, and he couldn't remember where he was or what he was doing.

That was prima facie evidence of a guy who was a really good teacher who lost his spark because of that publish or perish thing. That was another reason why Evergreen was so wonderful to be at. As an artist, I never felt I had to do anything but make art. I've had colleagues who taught at major universities in the art department, and they may not have had to publish anything, but they felt threatened that they had to do something all the time, to keep proving themselves. At Evergreen, I never did. I just felt if I did a good job teaching and got good student evaluations, that was all that was necessary.

It's a double-edged sword because in some ways, it kept me from making more art than I would have. You know how demanding teaching is at Evergreen in terms of your time load. As a parent, I had three kids and that takes up a lot of your time, too, so getting into the darkroom and making photographs was hard, hard, hard to do. Then trying to show work—which was, again, what my colleagues in other places would have to do. I wanted to do it, but I just didn't have the time really.

**Bowman:** I feel like I interrupted your train of thought or your flow. Before my questions, you were talking about when you first came to Evergreen in April '79 and that first year, the promise to teach came to fruition during that first year. I don't know if you want to take it from there or describe a little bit about what Evergreen was like when you got here in '79.

**Haft:** That's a good question, because in those days, Evergreen was a family, a real tight knit family. That was interesting. It was unusual from other places I'd been, but it was more like when I was a graduate student at WSU, the Art Department was a really tight knit group, some of them were. As graduate students, we partied and just had commerce with our faculty. It was really close.

This guy, Arthur Okazaki that I mentioned before, and his wife, as an undergraduate, he would invite me to his house, and he taught me how to make sourdough French bread. We'd have meals together and I was just a kid. Why this guy did this for me, I still don't quite understand. I guess I liked him, he liked me. That was unusual. It still strikes me as unusual. But now, I have colleagues that are 20 years younger than I am, but I feel the same way about, I suppose. They're just wonderful people to be around.

But Evergreen, I think I mentioned in our pre-talk, was always under fire from the State Legislature because the Governor at that time was this woman named Dixie Lee Ray. She had been head of the Atomic Energy Commission, so her nickname here was "Dixie Lee Radiation." She just hated Evergreen, with a passion, and made no pretense of any other emotion. She hated Evergreen, largely, I think, because I think she did not like Dan Evans, who started Evergreen. Every year, there was legislation that was brought forth to close Evergreen and to turn the college into something else.



That meant that every year, there were these just horrific times that we went through where administrators would have to come up with a list of people that they were going to have to cut if these budget cuts went through. They had to name names. They had to say, “Okay, you won’t be here next year if this happens.”

That could have made things very cutthroat, but it didn’t. The school just coalesced. Everybody kind of pulled together and said, “We can get through this, and we’ll figure out how to do this, regardless of what Dixie Lee Ray thinks.”

It was a tight knit group, and it was like a family. As I say, the college was small enough where I knew every faculty member, and I’m pretty sure most of them knew everybody, although I think I told you an anecdote about one guy who didn’t. [laughter]

I enjoyed working in the library, but I was frustrated because I really wanted to teach fulltime and knew that’s what I wanted to do. For six years or so, I sent out application after application after application for teaching jobs. At one point, it didn’t look like it was going to happen. So, I decided maybe I’ll go back and get a doctorate in psychology.

There was a faculty member at Evergreen, Don Finkel—a really wonderful guy, a psychologist—he’d been to Harvard and was a really great character. I asked Don for a letter of recommendation, and he was happy to oblige me. He put me in touch with the head of the Psychology Department at Harvard. [laughing]

I don’t know how this worked. I really don’t. I can’t remember the particulars. But I called this guy up and we had a great phone conversation, a really great phone conversation. He said, “Why don’t you just come here and work with me?” He accepted me over the phone, which I couldn’t believe. But nothing came of that because I decided, no, I’m going to follow up on this art thing.

About that time, I was offered a position—chairman of the Art Department—at a college in Texas called Austin College. I had been to Austin once on a business trip for the college. I went there for something, and I liked the city and realized it was probably the only liberal city in Texas. I thought, well, I could live there. But Austin College was in Sherman, Texas, which is north of Dallas. It was the bleakest place I’ve ever been in my life. [laughing] The college itself had been a religious school at one point, but now, it was a public school.

The student body was extremely wealthy—I was really kind of blown away by the students that I met—but extremely conservative. The chairman of the department, who was retiring and whose job I was going to take over, was this wonderful old guy. He was very honest with me, and that was the best

part about the interview. I went down there and talked to him a lot, because moving from here to Texas is a big deal, moving from anywhere to Texas.

One of the perks of the job was they had a February interim session where you didn't have to teach, but you could take the students abroad. That really appealed to me because I'd never gotten the travel bug out of my system after being in France. I asked this guy, "What do you do in the winter?" He says, "I go to Greece." He was kind of gleeful and I said, "Geez, I could do that, too. That would be great." [laughter]

I was all ready to take this job, and I came back. By that time, we had three kids. My wife was a lot less enthusiastic about taking the job than I was. They sent us this housing for faculty house that they would provide us with. Again, it was awful. It was like a barracks or something. Just awful.

This is a funny story. In graduate school, my wife, when I was teaching in California, she was commuting up to Davis to get her doctoral degree in English literature. She had a friend there who was from Texas who was really bright, and her husband was also from Texas. They became good friends of ours. But they both said to us when we talked to them about Texas, "The operative word is 'from.' We don't live in Texas anymore. We're from Texas." [laughter]

My wife called this woman named Shelly and said, "Bob's been offered this job in Sherman, Texas. What do you think?" There was a long pause on Shelly's part. Just silence. My eldest son is named Rembrandt. Shelly knew this and she says, "Does Rembrandt have a middle name?" My wife says, "Yeah, it's Joseph." Shelly says, "Well, maybe you could call him Remy Joe and he wouldn't get killed in the first year." [laughter] That put the kibosh on going to Texas. We thought, nah, we're not going to do this.

**Bowman:** And Rembrandt was probably thankful for that as well!

**Haft:** I'm pretty sure he is. Commensurate with that, about the same time at Evergreen, there was a colleague of mine named Paul Sparks who taught art and photography. He became a good friend. He and I taught this program called *Summerwork* when I was still on the staff. Every year, we taught this five-week *Summerwork* class year after year after year, and we became really good friends, although we just didn't agree on a lot of stuff—Sparks was a firebrand—but we liked each other.

I understood that Paul went to the faculty—maybe the arts faculty, I'm not sure, the Expressive Arts group—and said, "Look, Bob is going to leave here. He's not getting anywhere in the library and part-time teaching isn't doing it, so he's out of here unless we hire him." I'm pretty sure that, and this other colleague at Evergreen named Gordon Beck, both of those guys had taken me under their wing bigtime. Gordon's wife, Libby, was one of the women I worked with in the library. They were the first

family to invite me to dinner and to kind of really befriend me and my wife when she finally moved up here. She had to stay at Davis and finish her degree and sell the house and stuff.

But Gordon Beck was also one of the people who championed my getting on the faculty. He set up a program where I taught for one quarter full-time in a program with himself, Nancy Taylor, and . . . I'm going to blank on his name, and I shouldn't; ah, Leo Daugherty! Anyway, we taught this program, which was essentially Great Books of the Western World. I was the art historian and artist component. I had a great time doing it.

I know then Gordon championed my cause of getting on the faculty full-time. I know I told you last time I think I'm the only person who made the transition from staff to faculty. That may not be true anymore, but I think I was the first one who did it.

I want to talk a little bit about the staff-faculty divide, if you don't mind.

**Bowman:** Please.

**Haft:** Because that also stuck in my craw. I had a terminal degree, and I knew what I was doing. I had taught. There were other staff members who were incredibly competent at what they did. Bright, smart as a whip folks. But some of the faculty treated them like second-class citizens, and I just didn't like it. [laughing] And there were other faculty, again, who would treat you just like a brother or a peer. No difference whatsoever.

So, having worked on the staff for as many years as I did—six or so before I got hired full-time in the faculty—I knew everybody pretty well. Some people I liked, and some people I just did not like. Some people would not even acknowledge my existence if I was outside of the library. I'd wave to them on campus—some faculty members—and they would just totally ignore you. It makes me sad to think that that's still true, but I think it is true, the longtime divide between staff and faculty.

The original folks who set up Evergreen, I think, saw well beyond that divide, because they hired people who did not have terminal degrees who were terrific teachers, who only had a BA but were terrific teachers, and proved it. Other guys—like a guy named Doug Hitch, who ran the woodshop—he was incredible. He still is. He can build anything, and he did. The faculty would go to him and say, "Doug, I need this." "No problem." He'd do it.

Just incredible people on the staff, so I'm glad I had that opportunity to work with them because I saw the world differently after doing so. I hope I've treated them in the same way that I wanted to be treated when I was on the staff as a faculty member.

I was hired to teach finally full-time. I think it was '86. I think that was my first year teaching full-time. I taught with Susan Aurand and Pete Sinclair, both of whom were ideal teachers. Both of

them were legendary at Evergreen. The program was a year-long program. When you were hired, did you have to teach in a Core program?

**Bowman:** No.

**Haft:** That's too bad. They used to make everybody do it. [laughing] It was like basic training, I suppose, in the military. It kind of knocked you down to size and made you work with other people and learn their disciplines as well, so it was really good for us. I still have students from that program who are close friends and we're still in touch because you got to know the students so well—you'd have them to your house for potlucks and whatnot—and it was just a different relationship than I'd ever had with students at other places or having been a student at other places.

**Bowman:** Can you describe this first year-long Core program?

**Haft:** I don't remember the title of it, to tell you the truth, but I taught photography, Susan taught painting, Pete taught literature, and I taught some art history as well. The students were exposed to art and literature in a very big way by three very different personalities. I've got to say that. Real different.

But we all got along like a house afire. Pete—again, I can't hardly speak about him without choking up because I liked him so much—he died real tragically. But Susan and I are still close friends. I was just at a party at her house a couple of weeks ago.

I learned so much from these guys because they were, I think, founding faculty, or if not, Susan might have come the second year. Her interview was held in French, even though she's an art teacher! [laughing] That was the thing about Evergreen at the time was if somebody could do the job, especially if they could do their job and they weren't afraid to step outside their area of expertise and try something else, let's take this person on.

Apropos of that—this is jumping way ahead—one year, I was on a hiring committee much later in my career there. I can't even remember what the committee was, but there was a woman—one of the applicants—who clearly wasn't right for the job we were hiring for. But man, she was something, so we hired her just on the basis of that—Angela Gilliam—and man, she was great. That was the thing. On many of the early hiring committees that I was on, these people would show up that you just went, holy cow, this person has to teach [at Evergreen]. They're just made for this place, even though they weren't ready for the job or right for the job they were applying for.

I think I told you last time also when I worked on the staff, I came to the conclusion that there were three types of faculty at Evergreen. There were just world class people who could have taught—quite literally—anywhere in the world at any university. They were phenomenal.

There were people who could have taught anywhere in the United States. Then there were people who could only have taught at Evergreen. [laughing] It doesn't mean they were bad teachers. It just meant that that was the niche that they were made for. But if they had to go any other place, no, they would have washed out, I'm sure.

**Bowman:** It could be a framing typology to use when categorizing faculty.

**Haft:** Yeah. It was a good thing to come to understand as a staff member. I want to talk a minute about one of them, a guy named Bill Winden. Close friend. He had been an opera singer—both he and his wife—in Europe. He was from Tacoma, went to Stanford. I really don't know what he studied at Stanford. It was music, or, whatever. But he was a terrific painter. He was an absolute great painter [of] watercolors.

At Evergreen, one of the first years that I was there, I was granted access to a darkroom that was in the Communications Building. I was working in the library and there was a darkroom there, but I was granted access to this semi-private darkroom in the Communications Building that I could use whenever. But the Communications Building would close at a certain time at night, and if I wanted to work at 7:00 or something, I could call Police Services and say, "Can you come and let me in so I can work in the darkroom?"

One night—I was still on the staff at this point, I know, but I was teaching in the evenings—I was doing parttime teaching by then—I'm sitting outside the Comm Building waiting for Police Services to come and let me in and Bill Winden shows up. I didn't know him well. I just knew who he was. I was kind of in awe of him because I knew his reputation.

We started chatting, and then it became apparent he was waiting to get in the building, too, and I was like "Are you kidding me? You have to go through this same thing?" [laughing] "Yeah." He could have been self-righteous about it, I think. "What the hell you mean I can't get into my own building? This is where I teach!" But he was very humble about it. That's the way he was. He was just a humble person.

But he was incredible, both as a singer and as a visual artist. I know I said this to you last time. In the Expressive Arts meetings—let me back up. At that point at Evergreen, there are no departments, but there were these major groupings you could join. One was called Expressive Arts, and there was something else with literature, and something else in the sciences. There were big groups of people. You could choose which group you wanted to join. No matter what you were hired to do as a faculty member, you could say, "I'm an artist but I want to join the science group. They seem like fun people."

I went to all of the different meetings to decide which group I belonged to. The Expressive Arts people were singers, dancers, musicians, theater people, film people. And they were nuts. They were just all over the place. This is my group. [laughing] I feel really at home here.

But because they were so diverse, the Expressive Arts meetings sometimes would get really rancorous. Just brutal. Because they'd be fighting for money, for one thing—budgets. They used to just turn my stomach to knots when I was in these meetings to sit across from this. No, I can't do this. The people are too harsh. [laughing] They're fighting too much. Bill Winden would be in those meetings, and he would just clear his throat and say, "Well . . ." and the whole room would just calm down. He had that effect on people.

He and I later taught a program together called *The Structure of Chaos*, which was a hoot. It was one of the most fun I've ever had teaching with anybody because our faculty seminars, we would talk about the books that we were reading—we had a really great book list—but then we would just talk. After an hour or so, we would just talk. He would tell me stories about his life that were just incredible.

I hope you have that experience somehow, Michael. I hope you find some older faculty member who's willing to mentor you. Because you're relatively new there, yeah?

**Bowman:** Yes, that was my second year that just ended.

**Haft:** That's the other thing that Evergreen really did have going for it was great people who cared about each other deeply and weren't afraid to show it. That whole notion of hugging your students when you see them on campus or hugging a fellow faculty member, it was so shocking when I first arrived. Now, it just seems like, why wouldn't you? If you were anywhere in the world and you saw somebody, why wouldn't you stop and hug them, for heaven's sake?

One of the things that I really enjoyed about Evergreen was the people, the colleagues that I had that I loved working with. That's probably what I miss the most about not teaching at Evergreen is that camaraderie and closeness.

One of the faculty members—I think Rob Knapp—likened the fact that if you were in a three- or four-person faculty group, and you were together for a year, at the end of the year it was like a divorce. You broke up and it was really sad. You'd been close to these people, been on field trips sometimes with them for several days, and you just developed these intense personal relationships that then [snaps his fingers] were over. [laughing] You went on and did something else the next year with somebody else. Whoa.

We had to write peer evaluations for people we taught with, and some of them were just love letters. I couldn't help it. I taught with Marilyn Frasca—a great faculty member—and I just loved her.

Still do. It just seemed like how can you write a critique of someone that's impersonal? You could do that and still say, "I love you" at the end. It's like pointing out your kids' foibles, or have your parents point them out to you, and say, "Well, I still love you. I realize you're not a very good letter writer," or whatever. [laughing]

**Bowman:** I happen to be in the stage right now of writing some evaluations for my co-teachers from this past year. I feel very much the same. It also seems like an interesting entrée into the relationships that Evergreen produces amongst faculty to be able to look at those even now as sort of historical documents about what Evergreen was like over time.

**Haft:** Yeah. That's the one thing I hope doesn't change. I mentioned this party that I went to with Susan Aurand. It was to fete this fellow faculty member who has left, Nalini Nadkarni, who was a really bright star at Evergreen for many years. Of course, as we do at the end of the evening, we were sitting around talking about Evergreen and our experiences there. What's going to happen to the college? We were all kind of worried about it.

Now, I'm really worried, because I think, gawd, what a great experiment that place was. I just would hate to think that you weren't able to experience the same things that I got from Evergreen, and that most of the people I taught with got from Evergreen. That's that sense of a community that's really, really tight. You may not like all the people in it, but you respect them for what they do, and when there's a crisis, you all pull together to keep the ship afloat.

There were many crises during the first years that I was at Evergreen. Many, many. But they weathered them, and it made the place stronger. It is true that adversity does make you stronger.

**Bowman:** One of the things that we talked a little bit about in our first pre-interview was something like a question around your legacies, or your fondest memories of teaching at Evergreen. You talked about a number of experiences teaching abroad in Japan and France. It seems to go nicely with what you had said at the beginning about your travel bug that you got early on, and the kinds of teaching and learning that you did abroad. Do you want to talk to me about those programs?

**Haft:** Thank you for reminding me about that because the experience I had going abroad as an undergraduate was seminal. It changed me inexorably. I realized I learned more about this country by leaving it than I ever learned by living in it.

Also, the family with whom I had been placed in Avignon was so similar to my own family. There were six kids. Adding me was no big deal for them, and I just fell into step with the family. It was really great.

That experience made me want to pay them back somehow—pay Europe back, pay France back somehow. I approached the two faculty who were teaching in the French Program at that time—Susan Fiksdal and Marianne Bailey—this was in 1992—and I just floated the idea of them adding an art historian to the mix. But it was a secret ploy to get back to France. [laughing] I really wanted to see this family that I had left 25 years earlier. I'd still written letters to them for 25 years saying, "I'm coming back, I'm coming back." At some point, I'm sure they thought, yeah, Bob.

Susan and Marianne, I think reluctantly, took me on as a colleague. My French, by that time, was not very good anymore, but they let me teach with them. Then I got to accompany Marianne Bailey in the spring with a group of students to France and we just had a blast. Just had an absolute ball together. It cemented this notion that I wanted to do that more in the future.

I looked for other opportunities to teach abroad whenever I could. I put together a program with two guys I didn't know well, but I liked them both, Eric Larson and Gil Salcedo. We put together a program called *Good Fences Make Good Neighbors*, after a Robert Frost poem. It was to go to Mexico. I don't know where I got the idea. I really don't know why, but I know that program was my idea because they both thought it was a strange title for a program, number one, but I think they both wanted to go to Mexico, too.

Eric Larson was an anthropologist and Gil Salcedo, I really don't know what his discipline was, I'm afraid to say. [laughing] He was a wonderful guy. That was a year-long program and it culminated in a spring trip to Cuernavaca, where there was a language school. At the Evergreen campus then, we'd had a great Spanish teacher, Hugo Flores, who was from Cuernavaca and had taught at that language school. He said, "You ought to go there and have the students go there for a couple weeks and shore up their skills." Then Mexico City and, gosh, where did we go after that? Went all over. It was a really successful program. It was a really good one.

After that, I went to France again. Then Gordon Beck—the man I mentioned a long time ago, one of my mentors—he had long been taking students to Europe, to Italy primarily and Greece. He and I put together a program called *Discovering Greece*. It was a year-long program that ended in the spring quarter of me taking a group of students to Greece. I had 23 or something like that. Way too many.

I don't know why Gordon didn't join me, but I think he was happy. He went to France by himself, which was his wont. But in those days, the study abroad programs were sort of wild. We rented cars and car-camped throughout Greece, something I can't imagine happening at Evergreen today. Literally. But it was so cheap to do so, and Gordon had really greased the skids on how to do it.



He had car companies that he worked with and campgrounds that he knew. So, I was really well set up with this group of students I took.

That program, again, was a fabulous program. It was eye-opening to me. I had gotten interested in Greek statuary when I was teaching in the Bay Area, and I did a whole series of photographs called *Greek to Me*. It was just based on the standards of beauty that the Greeks had that they passed down to us, for better or worse—usually for worse because it usually has to do with the human body and us thinking that there's a perfect body, and men and women buying into that concept, which is too bad.

But Greece was a place that I fell in love with immediately. I felt so accepted there and at home there for some reason. Subsequent to Gordon's retiring and then unfortunately dying, I wanted to go back to Greece. By that time, we'd hired a new, young classicist—Helen Culyer---the only one Evergreen, I think, ever had; but she left after one year and we hired Andrew Reece, who was just a gem of a colleague. I would encourage you, Michael, if you want to teach with somebody, teach with Andrew. He is great.

He had applied to Evergreen once before and not gotten the job. I think I'd been on that hiring committee. I can't remember, but I think so. But I was on the hiring committee where he did get the job. Alan Nasser and I flew down to New Orleans during January or February—a just terrible time—interviewed him, and he really wanted to go to Evergreen; Andrew Reece did. He had been teaching at the University of Puget Sound. He just struck me as the most charming, likeable guy—and he is. No pretense about him.

We put together a program called *Greece and Italy, an Artistic and Literary Odyssey*. The acronym for that is GIALO—which is a homonym for an Italian word which means kind of the yellow press, comics that are blue or whatever—so we thought that was funny.

That program—whew—I still have students from that program who I'm very close to. We just had a great, great time. That was in 2006 and 2007. Then we did it again in 2009 and 2010. Subsequent to that, Andrew joined the deanery, much to my chagrin and much to the loss of his good health, I think. Don't be a dean. Between you and me off the record, but administrative stuff will kill you.

I still wanted to do that program and Andrew wasn't around, but Ulrike Krotscheck, who is now another classicist, is there. She and I and Stephen Beck taught it in 2013. I did it again in 2015 and again, I was with Ulrike. But neither one of them had enough students for either of them to travel with me to Greece. I always had to go by myself. For two years—2013 and 2015—I took students to Greece,

and I always had a lot of students, because the program was popular. But, boy, it's hard to wrangle students when you're abroad, especially any number over 15 or 10 even.

Then Andrew got out of the deanery and came back, and we did the program once more in 2018. It was just delightful. If there's a legacy that I've left at Evergreen, I hope it's that program. I know Andrew did it this year with Ulrike and Amjad Faur. I think he's going to do it again next year.

The other thing that I talked about that was important to me—it isn't a legacy, by any means, but I was part of a legacy—was the exchange program that Evergreen used to have with Kobe University, which was a business school, so it was a very interesting exchange really, because it was very conservative, very focused, and Evergreen is not. But the faculty that came from Japan were incredible people. They could teach in English, for heaven's sakes, and there's no way any of us could teach in Japanese. But they always let us go to Japan and teach in English there.

That experience came about thanks to another colleague I have to name, Hiro Kawasaki. He's probably my best friend today. We became friends at Evergreen because we taught together a number of times. We just like each other a lot. I have a son who was taking Japanese when he was in the third grade, so Hiro became kind of a mentor to him. But Hiro and I went to Europe with Marianne Bailey again. We did a program called . . . what was it? . . . it'll come to me: *Classical Legacy*. But we went together to Europe with a group of students, and while we were traveling, Hiro said to me, "Bob, would you do me a favor when you go back to Evergreen? Would you teach with this young man from Japan I know, who I'd like to have come over?"

Hiro had met this guy's father when Hiro was in graduate school—30 years earlier, at least, maybe more. I said, "That would be a pleasure. I'd love to." So, that happened. This family named the Okawahara came over from Japan. They have been indigo dyers and flag makers for seven generations. They're famous in Japan.

I taught with their son. We put together a program that included teaching the students indigo dying. Since the family was here, and the wife was an expert on the Japanese tea ceremony, she presented one for the students. The program was just unbelievable. I still marvel that it worked.

After that, Hiro said, "You should apply for the exchange thing in Japan because you have Japanese aesthetics." [laughing] I did, and I was lucky enough to get it. That was another experience that has enriched my life immeasurably. I have lots of good Japanese friends now and teaching there and living there for a while was an experience that I couldn't have wished for but was so lucky to have been able to be a part of.

I feel badly for this college now that that program has fallen by the wayside because it's really good to have some exchange, for the guys that are there to have someplace where you can to that's so different.

**Bowman:** I wonder if you could talk just a little bit more about that, and how those programs, or how teaching and learning for you abroad, as a faculty member, has impacted your teaching. You talked about the Japanese aesthetic, how it's changed your work as a photographer, as a visual artist.

**Haft:** I don't know if it changed my work, but it was in coincidence with my work already. Hiro would often say to me, "I wish I could see things through your eyes."

I didn't understand what he meant by that, but then one year, Hiro and his partner were living in Paris—they took a year off to live in Paris and travel around France—and I visited them. Hiro was off somewhere, but his partner and I went for a walk, just to get a chicken or something—it wasn't any big deal—and I didn't think anything of it. But afterwards, Hiro told me that his partner, Bill, said to him, "When Bob and I went for this walk, he pointed out stuff that I'd never seen before. I've been here for a year, and I didn't know this existed."

I think as a visual artist, and as someone who's probably a visual learner, I guess I'm really attuned to my landscape, what's around me. I'm out of touch with a lot of other stuff, I know that. [laughing] But I do tend to notice things that other folks overlook, I suppose. I think that's because I'm always looking for those things somehow.

In Japan and in Greece and in France and in Mexico, Italy—everyplace I go—that's the way it always is. The world is just a cornucopia visually for me when I'm traveling. I'm a pain in the neck to my family and probably my friends, because when we're traveling, they say, "Gosh, it just takes Bob so long to get anywhere because he's stopping all the time to make photographs." [laughing]

**Bowman:** As you were talking, it reminded me about I think it was a program that you discussed during our last conversation. *Take a Look?* Was that the name of the program?

**Haft:** Yeah. That was another dear colleague who I feel really badly about because he's suffering from Alzheimer's, Tom Foote. He was a character. I wish you could have met him because he's extremely funny, extremely smart. And he flew airplanes. He would do that, too. And he was a birder. At the radio station at Evergreen, KAOS, for years Tom had a weekly program on birding. Go figure. [laughing] I don't know how we met. I have no clue how we met. I think maybe because we share a sense of humor, and we were always laughing at stuff. But for some reason, we would stop and talk in the halls together as we passed one another. It's one of those things where he said, "Why don't we teach

together? Why don't we do something?" "What could it be?" "What do you know and what do I know?"

We put it together and it was journalism and art—photography—and just looking at things. That's it. I think that's it. I would go on walks with this guy, and he would say, "Look at that red-tailed hawk," and I'd go "Where?" [laughing] He says, "Right there." Or "Listen to that black-headed grosbeak." "What are you talking about?"

Being with him was what it must be like for other people when they're with me and I'm seeing stuff they don't, I guess. I thought, everybody who is an expert in something, it's good to go with them somewhere because they will just open your eyes to a world that you had not known existed. So, that's what we did. We put together a weekly visitation by experts. That was really a good idea, I thought.

Then we had the students go out into the field in teams of three. They had to triangulate, and they had to go to someplace out in nature—a pond, somewhere where they could all hear one another but they couldn't see one another, so if they got into trouble they could yell "Come help!" But they could not communicate or see one another. For two hours, we said, "You have to sit and observe whatever you all are triangulating on and take notes."

Boy, people bridled against that. "Are you kidding me? How stupid a thing is this?" But the proof was in the pudding, because at the end of the year, we had more students—I can say this honest and true—come and say, "That was the best thing that ever happened to me, making us sit out there for two hours for 10 weeks. I had no idea what nature was, or what I was capable of seeing and doing."

I think I told you about this one young woman from Los Angeles who was petrified to be outdoors. She grew up in the city. She did not like the woods at all. The bugs and everything just frightened her. At the end of that program, she was a total convert. I think that's a great thing to have happen, and to have a student be willing to admit it to you.

Tom and I did that program a couple of times at least. We took students up to Mt. St. Helens, we took them to the Shorebird Festival at Aberdeen and Hoquiam. We invited great guests in who were experts in whatever field. Allen Fiksdal, for example, Susan's husband, is a geologist. Before we went out to Mt. St. Helens, he talked about that to us, and he made the students be able to understand what they were seeing when they went up there.

I don't know what it's like for you now, but it used to be at faculty retreats, they'd say, "Michael, you join these two other people. You have an hour. Come up with your dream program." Do they still do anything of that nature?

**Bowman:** I have heard about this, but I have not experienced this. But I'm not quite sure if that's a function of Covid and the distance that we've had to be in for the past two years. I know it's one of the things that I heard about when I first got here, but I'm not sure if that's a continuing practice or not.

**Haft:** If I were you, I would advocate for it. [laughing] I would make noise. "You know, they should do this. I think it's a good idea." I met more people that way, some of whom I never got to teach with, but with whom I would have loved to have taught. Again, we were there maybe for two hours. All we did was talk to one another and say, "What would we do if we had to teach together? Let's try this." Some of the programs were pipedreams, but, man, it was really a great way to talk to faculty that I would not have had any intercourse with in any other way. There was always that hope, too, that maybe in the future, we'll get together and teach this program.

The other way that programs came about was just meeting someone in the hallway. Time after time, you didn't know them well as an individual, but you kind of had some camaraderie or some feeling of sympathy and you'd say, "What would you think if we taught together sometime?" Then you'd have to discuss, what would that look like, what could it possibly be?

The final guy maybe I should mention is Donald Morisato, with whom I have taught a number of times. He's the last person I taught with at Evergreen, too. My meetings with him came about just because he had mentored my son, Rembrandt, when Rembrandt was college age and looking to go to graduate school and didn't quite know where to head. Donald just laid out this course of action—"Do this, this and this"—and that's exactly what Rem did, and to his credit, it worked. If my wife and I had sat down with Rem and said the same thing, no, never. It wouldn't have worked. But when Donald said it, it stuck.

I felt this sense of gratitude toward Donald. I thought, well, this guy must know something. He's so charming, I want to teach with him. He's another person I know you should try to teach with because he's not going to be there for very long. He has a master's degree, I believe, in English literature and a doctorate in genetics. He is, bar none, the best-read person I've ever met in my life—I'm dead serious—and I've met a lot of people who read a lot, but nobody like Donald. He's self-effacing, humble as you can imagine, and a great geneticist.

We put together a program called *Taking Things Apart* where we studied vision—how we see things and how we apprehend the world. We dissected eyeballs. Then we had this whole thing on the physiology and the psychology of seeing. Then we bred fruit flies to see how their eyes work and how you could genetically alter the color of fruit flies' eyes, for instance.

It had art, literature, and science. All three. A program like that is a godsend to students who don't know why they're in college, because one of those three is going to click, I can guarantee you. If one of them clicks, then oftentimes they'll see a connection between something else in that program that they do like.

We've had students who have become scientists based on taking a program like that that did not have a scientific bent when they went to college, or didn't think they did, because they'd done poorly in high school. I've heard that a lot of times. "Science wasn't for me because I didn't do well in high school." But then when they got into college and maybe they studied with Donald or somebody else there who was a really good teacher there, they decided, oh, I can do this, and I actually enjoy doing this.

**Bowman:** This is what science is.

**Haft:** Yeah. Anything else on our list? I think that's about it from me.

**Bowman:** Okay. Just for conclusion, you had started to talk about this in the last few vignettes. Since this is a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, are there things that you think faculty like me—new to Evergreen—or students should know about the history and the development of Evergreen as a space of teaching and learning?

**Haft:** A couple things. I'm glad you asked that question. I really am glad you asked that question because I wouldn't have thought to say this, but it came up again at that party as something that a lot of the old faculty feel that the college kind of took a misdirection when—this is going to be hard to say, and I don't mean this as an attack on anybody at the college—they started to hire people who really weren't interested in teaching outside of their area. I felt that and a lot of us felt that way. We had colleagues who said, "No, I'm not going to do this," "No, I'm not going to do that." But that's why I thought they wanted to come to Evergreen, so that they could stretch their legs. To me, Evergreen was like getting paid to go to graduate school constantly, being forced to try something new.

I taught in physics programs, I taught in French programs, I taught in Spanish programs. None of those things are my forte, but boy, it really helped me as an artist, and just as a human being, I think, to learn those things. That's number one. I think you need to all be willing to take a risk and fail bigtime. And in front of the students. That's the best thing, failing in front of students. It blows their mind. If you're okay with it, and it's water off a duck's back to you, then it really blows their mind. Like, "wow, he was terrible on that and it doesn't seem to bother him. He still wants to come back and do this." That was one thing that I think is really important.

The other thing is, again, that sense of a community. I'm probably speaking way out of line here because I don't know what the campus atmosphere is like anymore, but the deal was, in the early days,

there was fierce, fierce infighting. People were just radical [laughing] and angry and upset with one another. But they admired one another for their area of expertise and for their willingness to try something new, to all work at this experiment together.

The thing I would hate to see is Evergreen become a mutual admiration society, number one. I think some sort of conflict is good. I think debate is not an option. But being able to respect people that maybe you don't admire so much, but being able to respect them, I think, is a really good thing.

Maybe we should turn the recorder off, and you can tell me what your opinion is of the college right now, what things are really like. [laughing] As I say, I don't know anymore.

**Bowman:** Anything else that you want to say on the record?

**Haft:** No, I think that's it. I think I've talked way too much already. But it's been fun. I've enjoyed doing this. I told you I interviewed Hiro, and as the interviewer, it was a blast. I just learned all this stuff about this guy I love that I never knew before. It was really wonderful.

I told Sam Schragger this, that I had so much fun doing it that the next week, I went back, and I interviewed Bill's partner, who's turning 96 next month. That, too, was just a hoot. I had so much fun learning about Bill's life and making a document now that I gave to his three sons that they were clueless about. He said, "They'd never really been that interested in my background." This is a guy who grew up in Seattle when Seattle was kind of a backwater town. But he knew everybody.

I can see why doing these interviews is a lot of fun. I admire you for doing it.

**Bowman:** It's both a lot of fun and I think provides some historical context on a really personal level, because as a new faculty member, we hear, and for me, I've been in the Northwest for 15 years with a little time away, but Evergreen has the mystique, and it has stories that are just everywhere in the public.

One of the reasons why I came to Evergreen was because of these stories that I'd heard from mostly former students at Evergreen, talking about how it was a life-changing experience for them—the way that they saw the world, the way that they engaged with other people and the world. You hear these stories, and then you also hear the stories of the rise and fall narrative.

Coming in when a lot of people are saying, "You're coming in at the fall of this great institution," it's hard to do, but to hear the stories and to also hear—just the advice that you left with, that the desire to see faculty once again feel and be supported to go outside of their area, to explore something new, and because of that, to be able to see their own discipline and their interests in a whole new light.

It's one of the things that I'm certainly taking away from this interview with you, and also one of the things that I hope that faculty can continue to push towards, because it's helpful to have some really

specific goals in mind in thinking about, okay, how can Evergreen both reimagine itself, but also stay true to what made it a really exquisite institution to begin with?

**Haft:** That prompts a final anecdote. Again, it has to do with this guy named Gordon Beck. Gordon was a pretty well-established faculty member, and I think either he had just been hired at Northwestern or had been at Northwestern for a while. He got an interview at Evergreen, and as a lark, he got on an airplane and flew out, thinking, I'm never going to take this job, but I've never been to the Northwest either.

He flew out here, saw Evergreen, saw what people were doing, got caught up in that fervor of the initial faculty members—things were wild. Gordon flew back home, and he said, "Pack up. We're going to Washington. The people out there are doing something that's really crazy and I want to be a part of it." His son still teaches at Evergreen, Stephen Beck. You might know him.

**Bowman:** Yeah, I was wondering if there was a relation.

**Haft:** I think that's it.

**Bowman:** Thank you so much, Bob. I'm going to stop the recording.