Mandeberg, Jean

Interviewed by Nancy Koppelman

The Evergreen State College oral history project

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FINAL

Koppelman: I'm sitting here with Jean Mandeberg on August 9, 2021, in Jean's living room in Olympia, Washington for her first Oral History Project interview. Thanks for being here, Jean.

Mandeberg: I'm thrilled to be here. I appreciate being asked to participate in this project.

Koppelman: Your voice and perspective is going to be really important to this project. When I started reading your biography, I was hoping that you might just summarize real quickly some of what you've put in here about where you grew up, what your household was like growing up. You're an artist, and you became an artist, it's clear. Can you talk a little bit about growing up, and the first moment in your biography where I felt like I saw that turn maybe was when you were at the Residential College? But maybe there was a turn before that, too, that's not in your bio. Tell us a little bit about your background.

Mandeberg: I grew up in Detroit in a Jewish neighborhood with a very stable, loving family. I expressed an interest in art early on. One of the memories I have of my housewife mother trying to encourage my interest in art is taking me to a class at the Detroit Art Institute. It was a class for children.

Koppelman: How old were you? Do you remember?

Mandeberg: Maybe I was eight. Temperamentally, this was a terrible move because I was very introverted and scared. She took me to this class, brought me to the doorway, and I remember uncharacteristically bursting into tears and pretty much throwing a fit. She took me out of the museum immediately. I remember it because it really wasn't like I usually behaved. I just remember thinking, I want to learn art, but not like this. Not in a gigantic room full of strangers. There's something wrong about that.

Similarly, I studied piano for a long time, and my parents decided that it would be good for me to have a recital. The recital was at the Catholic Church where I had never been before. I didn't even know what being Catholic really meant. I remember practicing, practicing, practicing. I was really good at it. My father played the piano.

We get to the church for the recital. We walk in the front door and there is a gigantic crucifix. I'd never seen a crucifix before. All I could imagine was you either do well at the recital or this is what happens to you. [laughter] I was a little kid. Maybe I was 10 at that point.

I guess, in recollection, I didn't have great timing or preparation for how to get involved in the arts. But luckily, growing up in Detroit, there was a world class museum, and although I never studied there, I would go there all the time and wander around. I learned all the rooms and spent a lot of time just looking. That was perfect. That was a great, great lesson.

Also, right across the street from the Art Institute, was the Detroit Public Library, which is a gigantic library and an important library. This combination of the library and the museum downtown really imprinted itself on me. When I was a teenager and began working, I think, through the synagogue, although I'm not really sure, as a tutor—I had a little kid who I was tutoring in English, and I said, "I'm going to take you to the library." I took him downtown to the main library, which I really thought was a temple to books because it was so beautiful. The ceilings are beautiful, the books—everything was beautiful. I got him a library card. Fabulous. We checked out books. Fabulous.

Then we walked outside, and I said, "Now we're going to go across the street to the Art Institute, because here it is. Books and art." He said, "Great! Can I check out the art also?" I thought, "Oh, no, you can check out books, but you can't check out art." He said, "So, why are we going there?" It was the first time I thought, okay, I see this through one lens. Other people see it differently.

Koppelman: How old were you then?

Mandeberg: That was a really interesting conversation. Maybe 12 or 13, something like that. I was trying to do good. I was so well intentioned.

Koppelman: You were doing good. You were.

Mandeberg: But I hadn't fully realized the function of these institutions and their impact on me. I continued to grow up in Detroit. I went to Henry Ford High School—talk about institutions. Didn't realize anything really about the man, Henry Ford. Just knew that as I traveled and said, "I'm going to Henry Ford High School," people would say, "Oh, does your father work for Henry Ford?" I'd say, "No, don't be ridiculous. Why would my father work for Henry Ford?" But I got asked that enough outside of Detroit that I realized that this was another institution—the automobile industry—that I needed to learn something about.

There were several of my parents' really good friends—notably, the Kramers—who were in the scrap metal business. Jews in Detroit and scrap metal was a thing. I've looked it up. I've done a little bit of research on it. I don't know the relationship of that to scrap fabric in New York on the Lower East

Side, for example, but this idea, if there's an automobile industry, there's scrap. Somebody's got to take care of the scrap. In my parents' circle of friends, it was these Jewish businessmen who took care of the scrap. I thought that was great. It was very intriguing to me.

The first time I ever went to a metal scrapyard was in Detroit. I stole—stole—a B&S gauge. A Brown & Sharp gauge is a round gauge that metal scrap dealers used to determine the thickness of sheet metal. These are easily purchased, but there was something about getting it from this yard—this was part of the lore—and walking through this scrapyard really was very intriguing to me.

Koppelman: Something tells me that stealing was not something you typically did.

Mandeberg: Did not.

Koppelman: That was a very big deal.

Mandeberg: The screaming in art class and the stealing, there are things, no no no no no, I never did anything like that. I still have that B&S gauge. I just treasure it. It's a very common tool. I use it all the time in my studio now and it really goes back to growing up in Detroit in a Jewish neighborhood, with Jewish scrap dealers.

My father sold furniture. He was a furniture dealer. My mother was a housewife. They were middle-class people who aspired to more, so when it was time for me to go to college, my parents said, "Where do you want to go?" I thought they were serious, so I did a bunch of research and I said, "I want to go to the Boston Museum's school. That would be really great."

My father had gone to the University of Michigan. His brother, my uncle, a whole bunch of people had gone to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor down the road.

Koppelman: Were they GI Bill people?

Mandeberg: Some of them were. But my parents said, "Great! Let's go look at colleges," so we went on a car trip, and we visited all these schools. Then we came home, and I said, "Great. I want to apply to Tufts. I want to apply to the Boston Museum School." There were at least one or two other schools. My parents went away, and they came back and said, "We can't afford any of those schools."

It was clear to me at that moment that they should have known right from the get-go that we couldn't have afforded any of those schools. I was really disappointed, but really wanted to go to college, and applied to the University of Michigan where the family had gone. I really don't know why, in filling out my application to Ann Arbor, I clicked the box that said the Residential College.

The only thing I can think, in retrospect, none of my family that had gone to the University of Michigan had gone to the Residential College, so I could at least distinguish my path a bit in that way.

Did I know what that meant? Absolutely not. Not a clue. It just was different. It was new. It was progressive. It was hip, and I thought, I'll do that.

Koppelman: That was around 1967-68?

Mandeberg: Yeah. It was a lively time in this country. There were the riots in Detroit. There were a million things going on. Detroit was . . . Detroit was, in a lot of ways, a terrific place to grow up. I wish I had been more ambitious about exploring it. I wish I had been given a longer leash to be out and about. My parents were very protective and very fearful people.

Koppelman: How many siblings did you have?

Mandeberg: One brother. Younger. Also went to the University of Michigan. Without going into great detail, I was named after my father's brother, Eugene, who was killed on the last day of the Second World War, after the war had been declared over. This was a family tragedy. I was named after him, which I always took as a great honor.

He was a writer. He went to the University of Michigan. He worked for *The Michigan Daily*, the newspaper. I have a packet of his short stories upstairs. He was a really gifted writer. He was in school in the '40s. He wrote about race. He wrote about gender. He was a really remarkable guy.

From my perspective, that was another inspiring element of Detroit was my uncle's creative life cut short. From my parents' perspective, it instilled a sense of fear in them about . . . I don't know how to explain this. It's sort of infused their parenting, and I realized at some point that when I outlived them, I had done what I needed to do as their child. Not die, like my namesake.

There were lots of ways that I was a good kid. I followed the rules. I didn't steal, all those kinds of things. But when I got to Ann Arbor to the University of Michigan, I could really—as many college kids—be more on my own and explore and try new things, and I did all those things, especially at the University of Michigan.

I was there the second year of the Residential College. My first day on campus, I needed a tour. I didn't know where anything was. It was just this gigantic campus. So, I signed up to take a tour, and who is the leader of my campus tour?

Koppelman: It must have been Joel.

Mandeberg: Joel Greene, who knows where everything is. He's tall. He's smart. He knows where everything is. He gives everybody a tour. He's taking ceramics. I sign up for ceramics. It's like, oh, my gawd. But he has a girlfriend who we call whatshername. I immediately, in my freshman year, have a boyfriend who is, I would say retrospectively, a motorcycle freak, and who pushed all my parents' buttons. It was perfect.

Koppelman: Well done, Jean.

Mandeberg: Thank you very much. Perfect, perfect, perfect. Joel and I didn't get involved romantically for a couple of years while we were off doing other things, but I was literally introduced to the University of Michigan by Joel and got involved in the Residential College. Looking back on it now, as faculty at Evergreen, learning at an interdisciplinary college, understanding that, yes, I wanted to go to college, but interdisciplinary work made complete sense to me. No grades, narrative evaluations made complete sense to me.

Koppelman: Is that how the Residential College worked?

Mandeberg: Yeah, it did. It worked, and it continues to work that way. But it uniquely was a part of the larger university, so I could take art history classes in the Art History Department, and I could take the interdisciplinary, team-taught core program at the Residential College. It was residential. Everybody lived in East Quad. By the time I went through graduate school and then wanted to teach and applied to Evergreen, of course it made sense to me because that was my undergraduate education.

I stayed in the Residential College for two years, took the core curriculum, and then really wanted to major in art history, and that meant I needed to take all my classes in the university's Art History Department. I did that—took art history classes. Joel, once again, is in the back of the room showing slides. It was one of his jobs on campus. My job was to sort books at the undergraduate library. So, we orbited each other.

I had great roommates. I made great friends. I lost my virginity. I went to protests. I did drugs. All the things that you do in Ann Arbor in the early '70s, I did. Mostly. [laughing] But interestingly, I was the person who the people on my hall would come to and they'd say, "Jean, we're all going to drop acid tonight and we need somebody to drive the car and stay sane. Could you come with us?"

Koppelman: You were the sober person.

Mandeberg: I was always the sober person. When my boyfriend got arrested at a protest, I was the one who bailed him out. I was that person.

Koppelman: You were the den mother.

Mandeberg: Yeah. I participated in life at Ann Arbor. I also watched life in Ann Arbor. The message from my parents was very clear. Being an artist was not an option. I took ceramics classes, but I took them in the community, not in the Art School. I was taking art history, so I was learning foreign languages and doing all that stuff so I could work in a museum.

I can't remember exactly when this happened. Years later, when I did get an MFA, my parents, from a distance, in response to the MFA show, said, "Congratulations, honey. That's terrific. Now what are you really going to do?"

My parents took me to the Art Institute in Detroit. We'd go on family trips, and we would always go to museums. We'd go to famous museums. We'd go to performances. We'd go to concerts. And yet, the message was pretty clear. This is something that you appreciate but this isn't a way to earn a living. I really did want to be able to support myself.

My mother never did or could support herself, and I saw the way she was dependent financially on my father and how that was unhealthy for the two of them, so I knew I wanted my own money somehow. I wasn't going to inherit it, so I was going to need to make it.

Much of my career has been trying to navigate how to be an artist and make art and teach at the same time. There was a graduate program at Yale at one point where all the MFA students were taught plumbing and electric work, ways that they could make a living. It was also you could make a living. I knew I didn't want to be a plumber or drive a cab or all these other alternatives, but teaching made sense to me, especially after the Residential College, teaching made sense to me.

I got an MFA in metalsmithing and jewelry making. Besides getting a graduate degree, it was a way to go west, so I got an MFA at Idaho State University. As far as my parents were concerned, it was like moving as far away as I possibly could from Detroit. This was not an unconscious decision. I needed a different environment. People often go to college or graduate school to live somewhere else, and that was certainly part of my strategy.

When I finished my MFA and I started applying for teaching jobs, there was an announcement for a teaching job at Evergreen to put together a metal studio. Clearly, the supplies had already been purchased, and there was even a room, but there didn't seem to be anybody who knew how to organize it all.

I thought, this sounds good, and my vague recollection is that I applied. Here's what I remember. I'm not sure exactly about this. It was a faculty position. I applied for it and then got a call back from someone saying, "Oh, yeah, that's changed. It's not a faculty position anymore. Now it's a staff position to put the studio together. You can apply for faculty next year, or you could be a visitor." There was enough for me that I thought, okay. But it wasn't what had been originally advertised. That should have given me a clue of what I was getting myself into. [laughter]

I applied and was a finalist, and flown to Washington. I'd never been to Olympia before, and now my parents said, "You really have gone as far away as you possibly could. You've gone to the other ocean. We get it." My mother sent care packages.

I came to Olympia and interviewed and it was fascinating, because I toured around the campus. There was this studio that needed to be put together. It was an adventure. I'd never been to Washington before.

Koppelman: This was 1978?

Mandeberg: Yeah. What I most remember from my introduction to Evergreen was being interviewed by faculty and students. Paul Sparks was sitting in that interview and very provocatively said, "Okay, we understand your answers to the questions so far. What are you going to do when you get here and there's no time for you to ever make art again?"

I didn't know Paul Sparks. I just knew what I thought, which was what I said: "I can't imagine never making art again. Of course, I'm going to figure out how to make art and teach at Evergreen. It's got to be humanly possible, and I will do that."

I remember being told by other people in the room that it shut Sparks up. They were very happy to have somebody who was interested in figuring this out, and it really was how I felt about it. I was not going to come here and give up art making, and I didn't see any reason why anybody had to do that.

I got the job. Joel and I packed up all of our belongings and moved to Olympia. We didn't know where we were going to live, but we had in graduate school purchased a house with another couple—a dump of a house—and we all on the weekends spent our time fixing this house up. We all sold it, and they went to Alaska, and we went to Washington, and we split the proceeds, and it was enough for us to put a down payment on a house in Olympia.

At first we didn't know where we were going to live so we parked our camper at Miller-Sylvania State Park. We got a real estate agent.

Koppelman: So, you had a camper?

Mandeberg: That's not true. We had a trailer. We had a trailer and a tent and a car. We parked all that at Miller-Sylvania in the summertime. We had this realtor who took us around and he said, "Where can I contact you?" We said, "Site" whatever number it was. He later told us that he really worked hard for us because we were living in a tent. [laughter] He really needed to get us settled somewhere.

He showed us houses, and we found this little house on the West Side near the food co-op. We thought, well, we'll just try and make a life here. It's summertime. We have this little house.

I go up to campus and one of my first memories of campus is going to Eileen Humphrey's office. She was the secretary who was going to tell me where my office was, get my keys, etc. Richard Alexander walked into Eileen's office while I was talking to her. I was sitting down. Richard was standing up. I remember Eileen introduced us, and he looked down at me and said, "Robbing the cradle a bit, aren't we?"

Koppelman: How old were you, Jean?

Mandeberg: About 28. I have no idea how old he was, but clearly, he thought, who the hell is she going to teach at Evergreen? Of course, I was thinking the same thing. I'd never taught. I had an MFA. I had experience as a student in this kind of college, but I'd never taught at this kind of college.

Luckily, when I arrived, almost everybody else had a ton of experience teaching, and there were deans' groups that were devoted to talking about teaching. It was like a tutorial in teaching every week, so I learned a lot, not just from planning programs, but from teaching collaboratively; from the deans' groups; from faculty seminars. It was like there were all these structures built in to teach about teaching while you were teaching. I found that process of constant examination and questioning really, at first, wonderful. It could be ultimately completely exhausting, and sometimes infuriating when I would pipe up at a meeting and say, "I don't think we need to talk about this again. We've already talked about it three times. We made a decision, and I think we just need to move on."

But what I value, in retrospect, is the ways I had a chance in my early interdisciplinary teaching to teach in big programs with faculty who would guide me about how to go about working at this academic institution.

Koppelman: It sounds like one thing you're saying is that you had a number of veteran colleagues who had already been teaching that way for a while, and here you come in, completely green in terms of teaching, and you felt taken under people's wings. As an artist especially, you're very observant and you could see a thing whole. That's really interesting.

Mandeberg: Yeah. There were faculty who very explicitly did that. The word "mentor" was not a part of anybody's vocabulary at that point, but Kaye V. Ladd, for example, said, "You're pretty new. I've been here for a while. Teach with me and I will tell you more about how the college works." She and Rita Pougiales and I taught together, and Kaye V. very consciously said, "This is what you do if you're a program coordinator," and showed me what that meant. I'm sure there were other things also.

The early years, I kidded at one point with somebody about how I felt that I should send notes to the students from my first couple of programs, apologizing for not knowing what I was doing. It was

obviously stressful. It was a lot of work. But there were also opportunities for me to learn along with the students, so that went right along with being so-called "co-learners."

I did know more than them. I planned the syllabus. I had reasoning behind all that. I knew what I was doing. But I was also questioning what we were doing.

I remember there was a wonderful book called *The Bride and the Bachelors*, about Cage and Raushenberg and a bunch of artists in that scene. It was an early seminar. We were reading *The Bride and the Bachelors*. Sat down, and one of the students in the room said, "Why are we reading this anyway? Before we discuss this, why are we even reading this?" Blah blah blah.

I remember thinking, okay, great. Then I explained why we were reading it. Afterwards, I thought, isn't that interesting? I wasn't defensive about it. It wasn't a problem for me because I was thinking all the time, why are we reading this? So, it made sense to me that somebody else would want to know that question. And that there was a reason we read this book and after and before this book, and that the sequence suggested particular questions that might be useful for assignments. All those kinds of things.

Koppelman: One of the things you're illustrating to me is—and you said it before—that because you were teaching with other people, there were things that you were able to learn. I wonder if you could say a little bit about what you wanted to learn. Because you said something in your bio about understanding the design and spirit of the curriculum, and I wonder if you could talk a little about the spirit of the curriculum, since the curriculum is so much a product of those collaborations between faculty. You have quite an eclectic group of people you taught with, so what did you want to learn, and what did you learn and from whom that you feel like has really stuck with you?

Mandeberg: That's a lot.

Koppelman: Yeah, and while you think about that, I'm going to pause this for just a second. [Recording stopped and then resumed 00:30:23.]

We were just talking about your teaching partnerships; what you wanted to learn as a teacher and how the spirit of the curriculum is very much the product of these collaborations. I think it takes students some time to figure that out. You may have gone into it already knowing that, in a way, because you'd been a student at a college like that, but students don't know that usually at the beginning. What did you want to learn, say, from Hiro [Kawasaki] or Thad [Curtz] or David Powell or Tom Womeldorff maybe that you knew you wanted to learn? What did you learn that you didn't even know you wanted to learn that surprised you working with people who you worked with?

Mandeberg: Um.

Koppelman: You can answer by way of stories even.

Mandeberg: I will do that. Let me just say, every fall, I had the experience of walking onto campus and feeling a deep sense of possibility that no matter how much I had planned, no matter how much I had tried to anticipate, I was going to be surprised. That spirit of possibility, of open-endedness, of curiosity, was hugely valuable to me—in my life and in my creative work. I always saw these programs—and I think I say this in here somewhere—as creative work. I would plan, understanding that we all needed a structure but that it would take shape in its final form depending on who the students were, and on what happened in the world, and depending on our interactions even on a day-by-day basis.

I saw some of my colleagues either not plan, or just barely plan. Or I saw some of them plan something that I thought was actually too tight, and then get upset when they couldn't realize that exact thing. I knew from making art that you research like crazy, you plan like crazy, and then you stay open to possibilities because the creative process is unpredictable.

That worked, in fact, really well for Evergreen programs. Different Drummers, for example. That was a really memorable program. Hiro at the mailboxes said to me one day, "You should teach with David Powell." I said, "Why? Really? C'mon."

Koppelman: Why did you say, "Why? C'mon" about David Powell?

Mandeberg: David was tall, loud, a little obnoxious. He wore too much aftershave. Everything about him was just too much. Hiro said, "No, no. You could learn something from him, and he's an interesting teacher. He knows about literature." I trusted Hiro because I taught with Hiro several times.

David Powell and I, at a faculty retreat—I can't remember how this worked, but I must have approached him to talk about possibly teaching together. We started talking about what we were interested in, and retreats were great for that. Just like speed dating.

One of the things I was interested in in my own work was outsider art, visionary art, art by untrained artists. He started talking about William Blake, and I started talking about the visionary art museum, and we realized that we shared interests in understanding the creative process, and where that element of unpredictability was, even for trained people. We started talking and putting things together even as I knew we were really different kinds of people.

We plan a program. We meet over the summer. We meet at his house. I meet his dogs. Okay. We put together a program. It's the first day of the program. We're in what will be an art studio and we present the curriculum. If I remember this correctly, I presented what we were going to do in the studio portion of the curriculum. He presented the creative writing portion. There were shared seminars, there were shared projects that we were doing.

At some point, David—when he was up in front of everybody—made some very disparaging comment about the arts. It was belittling. It was sort of like, yeah, yeah, we'll make some things, but we're going to write.

Koppelman: The real work.

Mandeberg: Exactly. I sat there and listened to that. We finished. The students are really excited. They take all their handouts. They leave. I sat there and I realized I was furious, so we had an argument. We had a big argument, and I explained to him why I was mad, why what he had said was insulting. He, to his credit, realized what he had said absolutely was insulting and inappropriate and a terrible way to start the program. He apologized. I felt better and he felt better.

Then he said, "Well, this is really good. We'll move forward now. But first, tomorrow when we meet with the students, we have to recreate this whole argument in front of the students." I just remember thinking, I am conflict averse. Why would I? This isn't a rehearsal. This was the real thing. We're done! He said, "No, no. This is really important for the students to understand what it means to really collaborate with someone, and how to work this out." So, I agree.

We get together the next day with the students and we explained that after we met with them the day before, David and I had a big argument. This is what we argued about. David talks about it, and I talk about it, and we talk about how in collaboration—not just cooperation but collaboration—there are misunderstandings. You step on each other's toes. You're each trying to do your part, and you're trying for those parts to fit together, and we're just figuring this out right now.

I explained how I was so mad and why I was mad. David talks about how he apologized. We go through the whole thing, and then we continued our work that day, whatever that was. Afterwards, students came up to us and said, "My parents always argued in the next room. I never got to see what a real argument was about." Or they would say, "I know you two are going to cooperate with each other, but this really is a different kind of partnership, collaborative teaching. Now I understand better that you're learning how to do this because you're never taught with each other. You've each taught, but not with each other." Everybody's figuring this out, and we made ourselves vulnerable in front of them.

Koppelman: This is something I'd love for you to say a little bit more about because it's very common, I think, for both students and teachers to think that many of the things that you just talked about that were obviously really valuable are really scary in a lot of educational contexts. Teachers should be sure of themselves. They should know what's going to happen before they go in. The students need a sense of security that the teachers all know where they're going and what's going to happen. And you're saying, in a way, the opposite. Not that you don't know anything that's going to happen, but that when

something does happen that you don't expect, where there's something to do with it—in this case it was to confront David about it— that it turned into something you couldn't have planned.

Mandeberg: Right.

Koppelman: Which is something you were talking about before. Why is that kind of thing so important in education? What you just told us, this really juicy story, where I'm picturing the students with their eyes wide open, saying to themselves, I can't believe this is really happening. Why is that good for students? Because it's counter-intuitive to a lot of educators, I think.

Mandeberg: I think it is, too, and I credit David obviously for insisting that we talk in front of the students. I think learning requires making yourself vulnerable, which is scary for students. Teaching, I think, also requires a certain vulnerability so that you can pay attention, shift gears, slow down, answer questions repeatedly, field unanticipated questions. I think that vulnerability, especially for some of my colleagues who had taught elsewhere where it was their classroom, their kingdom—they'd been solo in the classroom for a very long time—this idea of sharing the floor was really unusual.

I learned to be more openminded. It's as simple as when I would demonstrate how to use a bandsaw, I'd lay out the wood, I'd make a shape, we'd cut something out, and then I'd say, "If you think this is great, look what just fell on the floor." [laughter] That spirit of you think you're going for this but actually, you get that, too, and that could be more interesting, every day there was something like that if you were open to it and you paid attention to it.

At the time, I thought it was more about how to argue productively. There was that element to it, but I think it was much more about trying to be honest with ourselves, trying to be vulnerable, trying to constantly—like we were doing in deans' groups—say, "What's really going on here?" We thought we were asking this question. Is that the question we're actually addressing?

Koppelman: Can you say a little bit more about what deans' groups were? You've brought that up a couple of times and it was obviously a really important piece of your initiation into the culture.

Mandeberg: It was an initiating experience. Deans' groups were supposedly arbitrary groups of faculty that were assigned to one of the deans. You would meet in that dean's office pretty regularly.

Koppelman: How many people in a group?

Mandeberg: Twelve, 16, 20 even. There was a topic to discuss. Other than DTFs, it was a way to mix up the faculty and have people meet each other. The conversations could be pretty open-ended. There wasn't any, as I recall, recording or anything that needed to be produced. There wasn't any big decision that needed to happen as a result of these groups.

But for me, new to the college, it was a great way to both meet and understand who the players were, because I was already being asked what I wanted to teach the next year, and who I wanted to teach it with.

I think part of what happened with David, and what I learned from teaching with Thad, and also with Rob Knapp, was the importance of unexpectedly shifting gears. It doesn't matter what's on the agenda. You may refigure the agenda.

I remember when Thad and I taught together in Weird and Wondrous, we assigned a pretty rigorous schedule of papers. At some point—maybe the third week of the quarter—the students unanimously said, "We can't do this. This is way too much." I remember Thad and I looking at each other and saying, "Let's talk about it."

We talked as a program. These weren't students who were just complaining. We wanted them to do their best work. I knew, from what little experience I had, that I really wanted to push them to do their best work, but that there was a bell curve, and if I pushed them too far, they wouldn't sleep. It would be counterproductive.

Koppelman: You just made me realize something which is that if you're teaching a course, especially if someone—the chairman of your department—gives you a syllabus, there's already a plan. But when you're collaborating and team teaching, you don't know what the end is. You don't know what too much is.

Mandeberg: Right.

Koppelman: In a fulltime program, where do you know to draw the line? I think that happens a lot in programs.

Mandeberg: I think it does, too. Certainly, shifting gears with David on that first day, Thad and I also shifted gears and listened to students, which wasn't to say we would have automatically agreed with them, but we were able to hear them and say, "Okay, wait." In this case, they were right, I remember.

Koppelman: And they were able to say it.

Mandeberg: They were able to say it. We were able to hear it. I remember the students afterwards said, "Really?" We said, "Yeah, you made a good argument. It makes complete sense. We want this to be a good program. Let's try it. If you're partying every night because you don't have enough work to do, that's a problem. But finding the right balance of all these things is really important."

I want to say one other thing about this list in front of me. I realized from teaching with Hiro early on how important it was to teach with someone different from me. That was the other thing you said. I saw that some of my colleagues in the arts, who shall remain unnamed for this, were teaching

with the same people over and over again. It ultimately prompted a rule about how many different people you needed to teach with.

I taught with Hiro three times. It's not like I stopped teaching with him, but the first time he and I taught together, I realized—and he realized—how different we were, and that that was really valuable. That's part of what David and I did was say to the students, "We're really different. You're going to learn really different things from each of us. We're going to disagree about some things. We're going to present two different ways of seeing some things. It's up to you to figure out what your way of seeing this is."

That designed-in element of presenting alternatives was really important. In this case, different ideas, different cultural backgrounds, different religious backgrounds. Ultimately, when I would teach Working. Small by myself, I remember doing technical demonstrations where I would show how something was made, and everybody would go "Oh, okay, great," and they'd write down notes. Then I would say, "Or you could do it this way." Then I'd go through something completely different.

Of course, they'd say, "Which is the right way?" And I'd say, "It's up to you to determine which is the best way. I'm righthanded, so I do it this way. Blah, blah, blah. But how you choose to do it, so you don't hurt yourself, so you don't hurt anybody else, so you make the thing that you want to make is what the right way is."

I think it's more obvious in the studio, but it's true in seminars and in other programs. The idea is, like Cage says, you've got to make mistakes. How do you make mistakes without damaging yourself or somebody else? How do you test those edges of whatever that is that you're thinking about or wanting to make?

One of the hardest things for me in seminar was sitting and hearing people say things, and waiting through the silence until somebody else said, "That doesn't make sense to me." Because I could easily have jumped in and said, "Are you fucking kidding me?" [laughter] But it was really important for the students to say that. Or to walk around the studio watching people make things, and then just to stand and stop and watch somebody who's on the edge of doing something "wrong." But I could tell by the amount of strength that they're using, or the way they're holding a tool or whatever, that it's going to be okay, but I didn't want to be hovering over them and saying, "Here, let me do it. Are you sure you want to do it that way?" All those kinds of things.

Koppelman: Yeah. In situations like that, it sounds to me like there are several levels of things that you're teaching, and that you're aware that you're teaching art because you're teaching art because you're an art teacher, but you're teaching other things as well.

I think that's one of the hypotheses that I've been working on as I read these oral histories is that no matter what subjects people are teaching when they're teaching in teams, their teaching is these other layers that have to do with learning how to weigh things, judge, make decisions, deal with the consequences of your decision. Those are all ethical concerns. They're all values-based humanities-types of concerns that you learn about real specifically when you're studying philosophy or literature. But those same things are at work in all of these other fields because of the structure. All of these stories you're telling just shows me that. I've been taking all these notes about it as you've been talking, and I think that's really interesting. Also, that you're so aware that you're teaching these other things.

Mandeberg: That's true.

Koppelman: I wonder how that awareness came to you. Did you know it when you first started? Did it happen as a function of having different teaching partners? Because every program is like its own journey and its own little mini-marriage almost, and then a little mini-divorce at the end, hopefully amicable. It's its own little unit of experience that you learn things from, more than what the other person is actually teaching.

Mandeberg: Right. I learned about it by teaching with different people. There's a couple other ways, I think, I learned about it. Four things at once here. Let's see.

I learned about it by teaching with other people. Every time a new teaching team would form, I would be in a position to introduce myself and explain my point of view as an artist on this interdisciplinary team, and I'd have to figure out what that was. And I wanted to make a case for visual art and creative work being a part of this interdisciplinary team.

I heard my colleagues talk about the ways that art was included in interdisciplinary programs, but often out on the edge, or a little drawing workshop.

Koppelman: David Marr used to say, "like a bauble," so it's a bauble reading *Moby Dick*.

Mandeberg: Right, and so some of what I did was accumulate evidence and ammunition for making arguments with colleagues from different fields about why creative work was valuable to interdisciplinary study. There was that.

I did a faculty exchange at George Mason University one year, so Joel and I lived in D.C. We had a great time. I taught with a physicist at George Mason, an Iranian female physicist. It really was an exaggerated version of what I just described.

I was with these other faculty who weren't teaching in an interdisciplinary curriculum, and I would come to their big faculty meetings, and they would ask me questions. They wanted to teach

interdisciplinary work and they wanted to know how to go about doing it, and I would explain some things.

I remember one person saying, "That sounds like it takes a lot of time." I would think about it and go "Yeah, that's right. This isn't about efficiency. This takes a lot of time because you have to listen to each other, you have to try things out, you have to look at what was done before. Then you have to reflect on it, and you have to put it onto paper again. It just takes time, and everybody wants to be heard, and should be."

But presenting my ideas about teaching and the college to an outside audience, like the faculty at George Mason, was very interesting. It was very helpful. So, there was that. Then, as I said in here somewhere, I was on all these governance committees for a while.

Koppelman: I want to get to that for sure.

Mandeberg: When I started representing Evergreen on the State Arts Commission or the Olympia City Arts Commission, I realized that I wanted to make a good impression. I wanted them, not for myself but for the college, to realize we do really good work out there, so I looked for opportunities to give examples of what was going on at the college that was applicable to whatever policy decision we were making about the arts. I just had to be reflective and distanced from my experience in teaching in order to do that, to find the good examples and to find the appropriate moments.

I think some of my self-awareness happened as I was in these team-teaching situations. Some things I learned just by teaching long enough. Some of that had to do with being outside the college and being able to look back at it.

Koppelman: The reason to me why those are important answers to that question is what you're saying is, in a way, it's not something that someone can just teach you how to do.

Mandeberg: I don't think so.

Koppelman: You have to do it. All those steps you just said—do it, reflect on it, write it, this, that, the other. Then you become skilled at knowing what you're facing when you go into it, but each teaching experience is new and different.

Mandeberg: Right. It was the issue of time that always tripped up the folks at George Mason. "We can't spend that much time on any curriculum." This is the story I would tell.

A friend of mine who's a metalsmith in Seattle came to, I think it was Different Drummers, to give a lecture on her work. She was self-taught. That's why she was appropriate. And she brought a series of her medals. They were about three or four inches in diameter. Extraordinary. A whole sequence of them. She brought them to show the students.

She showed slides for a while, and then the students were all standing around looking at actual work that she'd brought in, and the students asked questions. First, they said, "How much does this cost?" She said, "This piece is $1,000." They said, "Ah-h-h!" [deep intake of breath] Then they said, "How long did it take you to make it?" There was this silence, because she's really good, and she said, "Twenty years." [laughter] Fantastic. It was perfect.

Koppelman: That is.

Mandeberg: It was just perfect. We're not working on the clock here. It's not that kind of job.

Koppelman: That's right. That's great.

Mandeberg: I need to take a break.

Koppelman: Let me pause.

[Recording resumes]

Koppelman: Okay, Jean. Go right ahead.

Mandeberg: In addition to deans' groups, I taught either with or near very experienced art faculty, like Marilyn Frasca. I remember Marilyn calling a couple of us together to talk about what we were doing in a program called Foundations of Visual Art. It was the entry-level program that we all agreed to cycle through in our teaching schedule. The understanding was that if we were all going to be doing this, it would be good to have some shared understanding about what we were doing. So, what were we doing?

What I remember most about those conversations was a definition of critique, and why critique was important, and Marilyn helping us all understand the importance of giving students time to really look, to think about what they saw in the work in front of them and not what you wished you'd see or what you hoped you would see or what you always wanted to see or whatever, but really trying to get to a place where outside of yourself, you were directly confronting this painting or sculpture.

That's much harder to do than it sounds like [unintelligible 00:59:18], I think. Some of the most inspiring interactions I've had with students have been at critique, because we all—in terms of what I said earlier—surprised ourselves with what had been made. People would bring their finished work. We would look at that work very seriously and very intently for a long time and say as best we could what we were seeing, and hope that that would help the person who was making.

It wasn't about judgment. It wasn't about reflection. It was simply offering back what their audience was seeing so they could take that information and do with it what they chose. This became a really valuable time for students. They didn't feel put upon. They didn't feel scared about it. They were eager for it.

One of the big things that I did was set deadlines for everything, critique and stick with those deadlines. Students also respected the deadlines because they wanted their work critiqued. It was just great impetus for all of us to get work done.

I learned a lot from Marilyn about critique, and about one other topic that I want to mention. It was about working in series. For Marilyn, it was very important that her students work in series and that we understand what that meant. She had a very particular way of doing it because she was working in drawing and painting and students could literally bring in 10 drawings a week.

In metalsmithing, you can't bring in 10 pieces a week. That's not realistic. But it was very helpful for me to hear her talk about her notion of series, and then apply it in sculpture, so that the students didn't feel—and I didn't feel, frankly—that every time they began an assignment, they were starting all over again.

Koppelman: Say a little bit about what that means, to work in series, because I don't think Marilyn talked about it in her interview.

Mandeberg: My notion about working in series, that I credit Marilyn with, is understanding that every piece you do as an artist is related to and builds on the piece that came before it. In fact, when you're working deliberately in a series, there can be a number of related pieces that don't repeat themselves but generate the next piece.

I think series is misunderstood as license to repeat this form 10 more times, make a show, and sell them all. That's the lowest common denominator of what a series is. But for Marilyn, the idea was you make one piece, you learn something from it, and then you take that seed of learning and you put it into the next piece. Then you take that seed and you put it into the next piece, so that it builds on itself. I think the word that we came up with from student academic statements was iterative. It's an iterative way of working.

When I applied that to program planning, for example, it meant that the sequence of assignments I saw as a series. The students wouldn't necessarily see it that way, but at the end of the quarter, they'd look at their work and say, "Ah! This piece relates to that piece." Yes, it does, and it's a very meaningful way of building a portfolio of work.

I use that idea of series, as I say, in curriculum planning, and certainly in my own work. Early on, I remember, nobody talked to me about that in graduate school. I remember right after graduate school—a vulnerable time to continue a studio practice—just going into the studio and feeling like I was just starting from scratch. What was I going to do? What was I going to do now? And that's way too hard. Way too hard.

On teaching, [I realized] I wasn't starting from scratch. I already had ideas. It wasn't that I was stealing from myself or repeating myself. I had a foundation. Why not use it?

Those two things from Marilyn were really important to me as a young faculty. It also then was a way that all of us talked about what we wanted to teach in Foundations of Visual Art.

Koppelman: Let me just ask you a question. Does that mean that one piece of that that you all agreed on was to use series as a form, or not?

Mandeberg: No, we didn't agree that we'd all use series. We agreed that we would all have a critique, and that this is what critique could be.

Koppelman: Got it.

Mandeberg: I remember we all agreed that we were teaching students how to work. That was also very important. Then we would have long discussions about, what does that mean?

Koppelman: Yeah, how are you going to do that?

Mandeberg: Does it mean patience? Does it mean stamina? Does it mean persistence? All the things. And it means a lot of time. Well, we know what that's like.

Koppelman: Yeah.

Mandeberg: Those conversations, like the deans' group conversations, were really very valuable. We all knew that we would be interpreting Foundations of Visual Art a bit differently because we were different people and we had different art disciplines. But to all get together and say, look, we're all going to be teaching this program over the next five years in one form or another. Let's talk about how we could even agree on little parts of it. Should there be art history in the program? We decided yes, there should be. Should there be design and drawing? Yes, there should be. How I teach design and drawing is different than how Marilyn teaches it, but there will be something called design and drawing.

It was a very collegial way of getting together with people, some of whom I never taught with, to talk about teaching art in particular.

Koppelman: Can you give me an idea of how many people would have been in this group?

Mandeberg: Not many. Six maybe. Five. Something like that. The other thing about teaching that I want to talk about is a question that you asked me, what made a great program at Evergreen? Because I certainly remember that there were some years—especially early on, where I would think, oh, I could have done that better, or I could have done this or whatever—the students learned something, but it just wasn't good enough.

Then, when I did teach a program that really changed people's lives—changed my life, changed the students' lives—and they made really exciting work. You think, I want to do that again!

Koppelman: Yeah. [laughter]

Mandeberg: One of the times that happened was when Lisa Sweet and I taught a program called Art and Religious Practice. Lisa and I both wanted to teach a combination of studio and art history. I was very aware of the fact that I had never included anything about my Jewish identity in my teaching, and that it was really important to me. And I wanted to learn some things.

Lisa didn't know anything about Jews and Jewishness and Judaism, so we would have these great faculty seminars. She would say, "Hell. How about hell? Do you believe in hell?" We'd have long conversations.

The students worked with her in printmaking and the students worked with me in fine metals. We designed the program so that she could participate in the metals studio and come up and learn with the students, and I could go down to the printmaking studio and be a printmaking student.

Koppelman: That's the best.

Mandeberg: We had to bend ourselves into pretzels to make that happen, and to repeat the studio and the art history and the seminar and the critique and all these different parts. But it was great to be in each other's studios. I think it was part of the reason that the second quarter of the program—I think it was the second and not the third quarter.

Koppelman: It was a full-year program.

Mandeberg: Then it was the third quarter of the program. We wanted to do a big project, a major project, in this core freshman program. I dreamed up an assignment for everyone to make what we called a "book of blessings." We talked to the students about blessings in the history of religious practice. We asked them to make a print that was a visual expression of a blessing. Then we asked them to make 40 of them, which was very demanding and very difficult. But if they made 40 prints, that would be the assignment.

In the metals part, we wanted them to make the covers of a book. It could be enameled, it could be pierced, it could be stamped—there were a variety of things—and then I remember, before we gave this assignment, Lisa and I went into the studio literally locked the door and said, "What is this?"

Koppelman: What did we do? [laughing]

Mandeberg: How do you make a book out of metal? How do you bind it? How do we hold—the idea was students would make the prints, individual students would make the covers. Then, on a single day, they would each trade the prints with each other, and bind them so that each student, at the end of their freshman year, would walk away with an example of a print by each of their fellow students held in place by their metal cover.

Koppelman: Wow. That is an amazing project.

Mandeberg: We figured out a binding process with rivets. I don't know, it was complicated, but we figured it out. We designed it ourselves, and then we decided to display all the final pieces in cabinets in the Evergreen library. You know in the library when you're walking down the stairs, there are these cabinets on the wall?

Koppelman: Yes.

Mandeberg: We arranged all of the books of blessings in those cabinets. The students sat on the stairs and looked at it, and everybody was just stunned. Really, everybody killed themselves to finish these. Everybody appreciated how valuable this book would be in their life, because it was physical evidence of their freshman year of college.

I remember Lisa saying, "This was a great example, in any program, of how you can always do more than you think you can do." She was absolutely right, and that was such an important lesson for the students who just wanted to give up so many times. For Lisa and me, it was like, oh, my gawd. Two type A personalities saying, "Quit? We can't do that. Get back to work!"

The work was beautiful. I remember Matt Smith, bless his heart, coming to see them. He was just blown away. I remember watching him look at this series of books and saying something like this was the most coherent body of visual program work he had ever seen. The books were very individual, they were very unique, and the exhibit was very coherent. The students took great pride in what they had accomplished. That was partly why that was a great program.

One other reason that was a great program was the week before our last seminar, we changed things out entirely. I remember Lisa and I sitting in a room with students talking about seminar and critique, and what are we going to do for the last seminar? We left it open, and what we decided to do was re-read a book from the first quarter.

Koppelman: Great idea.

Mandeberg: The students, I remember, at the time saying, "Sure, I already read that book. Okay, fine."

Koppelman: Do you remember what the book was?

Mandeberg: It was about Jewish ritual. It was published by the Jewish Museum in New York. It was about the relationship of objects and public and private rituals. We'd had a good seminar on it. Students agreed to re-read it. We re-read it, and while those books of blessings were up, we had this final seminar where the students realized that revisiting something was very valuable.

Koppelman: That was a really good idea.

Mandeberg: It was brilliant, really. That combination of a show and the seminar, the students were walking on air afterwards. I remember thinking that was such a great program. I never did that again—re-read a book like that—but it fit. It really was a good idea.

Koppelman: It's interesting, hearing all of the details and the different moves that you made over the course of that program, the decisions you made about projects and everything else. One of the things that I feel like I'm seeing in the description is you and Lisa being all in in the same way in what you were doing.

Mandeberg: Yeah.

Koppelman: That all of that depended on probably a similar orientation to the work, with the work at the center.

Mandeberg: That's true.

Koppelman: And being able to do that. Sometimes that's not always the case in a team, but that's what I'm hearing you say.

Mandeberg: I think you're absolutely right. I feel very fortunate to have had a number of good teaching experiences, and enough great teaching experiences, really memorable. As I say, life-changing for me and students who continue to write to me.

Koppelman: That's really wonderful. Is there another topic on your list about teaching that you want to talk about before I ask you my final question, which comes from the things you've said in this interview? [whispering 01:14:53].

Mandeberg: The only other thing I want to say goes back to the folks at George Mason saying, "But that takes so much time." I at some point in my career, because I could afford it I started taking leaves without pay in spring quarter. I remember early on in my career, Irwin Zuckerman, I think, took one year on and one year off. I filed that away somewhere. That was interesting.

Then there were faculty like Susie, who took a quarter off. Generally, it was to do a particular project or write a particular book. I decided that if it was valuable to me, as I'd told Paul Sparks that I needed to continue doing my own studio work while I was teaching, I needed to find more time for my own work. As I got older, I also needed to rest.

So, I started taking spring quarter off. I was real straightforward with my colleagues that when I was at the college, I was all in at the college. I would work my tush off. But when I was gone, I was really gone. Joel and I traveled often internationally, and I got a lot of work done. I don't think I could have had the career that I had at Evergreen and been as happy with my teaching if I hadn't been in the position to take so many leaves without pay.

That's the reality of it. We don't have kids. I didn't have alimony payments, all those other things that my colleagues told me about. What I needed was time, and I really appreciate that the college was in a position to be flexible enough to give me that time.

My colleagues were envious. Not everybody was happy about my doing this, I know that. I just knew that it was essential to my well-being, so I did it. But that was an ingredient in this—finding the right colleagues, and planning programs, and teaching, and learning, and all those things—was also the resting and finding time to do my own work.

Koppelman: I'm really glad that you brought that up.

Mandeberg: Thank you.

Koppelman: Here's my question that comes from what you've told me just in the last hour. There were two things you said that to me raise a question. At the very beginning, you talked about as a kid coming to an awareness of what institutions are. You were really explicit about that, about a museum, about the library, about even the scrap metal business, and that there were these different institutions, and you said something about how important these institutions are; that they're an important piece of a culture.

When you were talking about it, it seemed as if the important thing you were noticing was each institution has a boundary around it. It has a function and a purpose and a certain boundary around it, and they're all different from each other, so that's why you can't borrow the artwork. Just understanding that they're not all the same, but they have something in common, and that's an important piece of what makes a society go, and that you need these institutions. You needed the library and the museum

Later on, you talked about as a teacher, as a person who's actually responsible for such an institution—because when you're a teacher, that's what you are; you are a member of an institution with a boundary and a purpose, and it does some things and not others—and that when you walked in every fall, you walked in with a deep sense of possibility. You knew you'd be surprised no matter how much you planned.

I wonder if you could say something about the relationship between that, which sounds like the boundary is permeable, the boundary is not so clear as it is with a library. There are certain things that are not possible with a library because it's a library and that's what it does. It has this mission, and you borrow books. Certainly, there are some things that are flexible, but really, it does that. Likewise with a museum, one boundary is, most of the time, you can't borrow the artwork.

I was just really interested when you talked about the institution that you were a steward of, that you were a part of, that you helped to build—and it's clear that you helped to build it even as it was building you—that this deep sense of possibility is part of what makes this institution what it is. I wonder if you could just say something about the college as an institution, and yourself as a steward of this institution, with this particular orientation. Not I'm there like my brother teaches at a law school. He goes in there. He teaches constitutional law every year. It's kind of the same thing every year, more or less. There's a clear boundary around it. It's not a deep sense of possibility. It's not I'm going to be surprised every time. Sometimes he'll be surprised, but it's rare. Whereas for you, you're saying that this is common. I just wanted to say all that to you and see what came up for you in thinking about institutions in that way? This is a good precursor to our next conversation, where we'll talk more broadly about community institutions and connections between the college and other institutions.

Mandeberg: That's a really good question, Nancy.

Koppelman: If you need to think about it, that's fine, but I just wanted to be sure to get it out there.

Mandeberg: One of the ways that I—I don't know how consciously—acted on this notion of the college as an institution was a sculpture program that I taught called Form and Function that I taught by myself. I wanted to teach a group of students, using the college campus as our exhibition space.

I remember getting together with the students and saying, "You walk on these pathways, and you go from here to here. Now I want you to walk on those pathways but look at them differently. Think about not just the buildings, but the spaces in between the buildings that make up this college." I wasn't interested in decorating those areas, but in pointing them out. Pointing out the pathways, the dead ends, the reflections, the repetitions of shape, all kinds of things.

With the students, we would walk around and plant ourselves at various areas and just look at those kinds of issues around campus. Students made maybe—at least a dozen—collaborated on some really big pieces, but there were at least a dozen pieces that were installed all over campus. It really was a moment where I thought about the institution. We had to meet with the Buildings and Grounds people. We had to get clearance from them that we weren't putting anything in the ground that was going to break a powerline.

I remember the students. When I said to the students, "We need to meet with somebody to see what's under the ground there," they said, "Under the ground?" I said, "Yeah, there could be pipes. There could be wires. There was all kinds of infrastructure underneath there. It was like, "Oh, yeah, we have electricity in these buildings that makes it work."

I invited Grounds staff and the campus architect and the police. Everybody came and critiqued the students' designs at some point. "If you put this there, then this will happen." Or "No, you can't put artwork in the elevators because then wheelchairs can't get in there."

Koppelman: In other words, strategizing. Not thumbs up or thumbs down, but how do we make this work?

Mandeberg: Right, and some of it was about the functioning of an institution as a complex, shared space that we all move around in, and if you want to add something to that three-dimensional space you need to make sure that you still can move, and that people can move in whatever weird ways they need to, and if the lights go out, nobody's going to trip and kill themselves. All these kinds of things.

That's probably the most explicit way I thought about the college as an institution. They could physically support the exhibition of work in ways that it hadn't ever before.

Koppelman: One thing I love about that description is that the place where you found possibility in the institution are the places where it appears the institution is not.

Mandeberg: Yes, exactly.

Koppelman: I think that's a pretty special idea.

Mandeberg: Yeah, that's absolutely right.

Koppelman: That's great. Okay. An hour and a half. I think we're done until next time.

Mandeberg: That sounds great.

Koppelman: I'm going to stop recording.