

Kitty Parker
Interviewed by Jin Darney
The Evergreen State College oral history project
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FINAL

Darney: It's Wednesday, December 15, 2021. I'm interviewing Kitty Parker in Olympia. Thank you, Kitty, for agreeing to do this. I look forward to this conversation. You were born and raised in Olympia?

Parker: No, I was born in Soap Lake Hospital. My parents lived in Quincy in a tiny building that used to be a railroad ticket office, so it was right next to the tracks. They started a newspaper there, which is still going.

Darney: Where's Quincy?

Parker: Quincy is not far from Soap Lake. It's in Eastern Washington.

Darney: Hm. Were they in the newspaper business, or did they just do it?

Parker: They just did it. The dam was going in and that enormous irrigation project was happening, and they conjured up the notion that there was going to be a lot more people over there and they were going to need a newspaper. They did. They just made it happen.

Darney: How long did they stay there?

Parker: Between one and two years, something like that. Then they sold the paper to a friend of my dad's. It still has its same goofy name, the *Quincy Valley Post Register*. [laughter]

Darney: Was it a weekly?

Parker: Yeah, it was a weekly.

Darney: Did you go to Olympia after that?

Parker: Oh, no. We moved a number of places. In fact, all four of the kids in my family were born in Eastern Washington, in Ellensburg, in Yakima, and in Quincy. We moved around there a lot. My dad was not good at keeping a job, but he did various things. He eventually got blackballed for his political stances. He had a friend over here who was able to get him a job with, I think, the GSA, the General Services Administration. He was able to hang onto that for a while and not get too political about things for a while.

Darney: How old were you when you moved to Olympia?

Parker: About five. My brother was a little baby.

Darney: I don't know if we do this chronologically. Let's talk about your time at Evergreen in various roles. When did you come to Evergreen?

Parker: I came as a student the second year of classes. I think my first class was called P.O.R.T.A.L.S., which was a long acronym that stood for Personalized Options Reaching Toward Affective Learning Skills. It was taught by a team of faculty—I think five—plus a group of students who'd been in a program about teaching the first year.

Darney: Oh, wow.

Parker: Yeah, it was interesting.

Darney: Those students had been with those faculty for the second year?

Parker: I think that's how it worked.

Darney: Were you a freshman, or did you transfer in?

Parker: I would have been a sophomore, I think, because I had been to four other colleges for a quarter here, part of a quarter there. My family was amazed that after several years, I went to school, I stayed there for three years in a row, and actually got a degree. I don't think they thought that would happen anymore by then. [laughing]

Darney: Was it just that the other places didn't work out for you? What changed?

Parker: Community colleges, and I went to Western for a short while. One thing is that my parents had just gotten divorced about the time I started going away to school, and it was hard to keep my head in the game, as it were. But also, I just didn't find the schools very challenging or interesting. It did not motivate me to keep going. I felt more like they put restrictions on learning. When I found Evergreen, it was like coming home. It was really perfect for me.

Darney: You didn't feel those restrictions.

Parker: No, no, because we were completely and thoroughly engaged, and we could go as far as we wanted to.

Darney: That program was the first year you were here.

Parker: Yeah. I took a little side trip and got out of it in the middle of the year and went over to Marilyn Frasca and Susan Christian's program. Marilyn got sick and was not able to be there and I decided to move back to the Portals program, so I spent most of the year over there.

Darney: Did you go straight through at Evergreen?

Parker: I did. The next year, I took Vision and Expression from Paul Sparks. That was pretty magic. I can't even remember what else I did, but I did a lot of art programs. I worked with Susan. I worked with Sparks. I worked with Marilyn a little bit.

I kept coming back, so I would do summer programs with like Gregory . . . Michael Beug's brother-in-law . . . Gregory Crane, the painter. I also came back and did the teaching program that before it was a master's degree, it was a collaboration between Evergreen and UPS. That was also quite wonderful.

Darney: After you got your BA?

Parker: Right.

Darney: What happened after you got your BA? You did a teaching program.

Parker: Right. I very cleverly earned my teaching degree in art right when they were slashing and not renewing all of the art programs and faculty and stuff. But I did teach for half a year at Timberline High School, and I did a bunch of subbing and such.

Eventually, I went and applied for a job at Evergreen that was not the director, a program manager or assistant or something for Academic Advising. I had had other temporary jobs in between. I worked for Housing. I worked for Student Finances. I worked for Financial Aid. I did a project for Susan on something she was working on, so I was there as a temporary a lot. Eventually, I got a real job and stayed there.

Darney: Do you remember when that was when you went into Advising?

Parker: Program Coordinator, that's what I was, in Academic Advising. I had a couple of jobs with the State before I came to Evergreen, this and that, and owned a small business, served as a teacher aide. Student Accounts between '80 and '86, several times in Financial Aid. 1986 was when I came to Advising.

Darney: Back up a little bit about other things you did. What was the small business?

Parker: It was called Wall Works. It was a painting and wallpaper hanging business. I made enough to cover daycare. [laughter]

Darney: Were you on your own?

Parker: I actually was in the business with my neighbor.

Darney: By that time, you had married?

Parker: I married Sparks probably in . . . let's see . . . we probably got married around '73. Jenny Rose was born in '79, and we moved here, I think, in '74.

Darney: To this house?

Parker: To this house, so I've lived here for almost 50 years.

Darney: But the wallpapering business didn't last long?

Parker: Not long, no. [laughing]

Darney: What did you do in Housing?

Parker: In Housing, they had some people who were out for health and also school reasons, so I came and I was just the financial/budget person, and I also talked to a lot of students, and worked with them, and I did whatever they needed. I found a whole cache of housing deposits that had never been claimed, entertaining, stuff like that.

I was getting divorced during that time, so many nights, Housing Director Jeannie Chandler and I would go over to Charlie's Restaurant with our two children. Our kids would go to the mall, and we would drink gin and tonics. [laughter] Jeannie was getting divorced, too. She was the Director of Housing at that time.

Darney: Is that where you met her?

Parker: She worked in Financial Aid and then I worked in Financial Aid as a student, and so we knew each other a tiny bit from that.

Darney: But that was when you became friends?

Parker: That's when we really became friends.

Darney: When you went into Advising, where did you start? What did you do first?

Parker: I was the Program Coordinator, and I think Kris (Johanson Liburdy) Goddard had been the assistant before me. At that time, the faculty person came for two years, and they were the Director of the office.

Darney: Interesting.

Parker: Larry Eickstaedt, my next-door neighbor, hired me. I didn't think he would because we went through this interview, and at the main interview, there were 10 people or maybe more, and one of them was Gail Martin. I thought, wow, for a program coordinator I wonder what's going on here? I'm still not entirely sure, but it was clearly important to them.

Larry and I had a follow-up interview over in the CAB and he said to me, "I watch a lot of sports," and I thought, oh, shit, I'm not going to get this job. I said, "Well, I don't." And he still hired me. [laughter]

We had a couple good years, and I made that job into more than a support staff for the faculty. I did a bunch of advising for the teaching program, which Larry didn't know about, but I'd been through it, so I knew. The preparation to get into the teaching program was complicated, and I don't think the Admissions Office was really helping people with that. But I did. I just made bulletin boards and talked to people. I just had a wonderful time inventing that job.

Darney: After he left, did it remain a two-year position for faculty?

Parker: It did for a while. In fact, Jerry Lassen was the one who went to the dean at that time, Shannon Ellis, and said, "This is silly that the faculty is called the director. It should be her." I don't really think that was because we were going to get married. I think he was right.

But I worked a couple years with Rudy Martin, a couple years with Betty Ruth Estes, a couple years with Russ Fox. Several different, very wonderful people.

Darney: Do you think that they brought something important to Advising? The faculty role?

Parker: Oh, bigtime, because especially as Advising became more visible and busier, they began to just see how critical Advising was to students, which I think wasn't clear really early on. I think in the beginning, there was more advising. There were more individual conversations between faculty and students, thinking about "What next?" together, and the whole evaluation process.

Darney: In programs, you mean?

Parker: In programs and individual contracts and in all aspects—in the beginning. It did fade away, and I used to worry a little bit about the Advising Office taking that away. Because we were easier to find. We were there. We probably knew. Students coming from more traditionally structured schools knew there would be an Advising Office. And we did see a lot of students.

Darney: Did you feel like you did take it away, or was it gone already and that's why you stepped in?

Parker: Yes. I think it was happening. It was just what was happening, and we had a small role in that.

Darney: If you could see it, what do you think it did for the faculty who were in Advising?

Parker: I think it gave them a surprising picture of how well the curriculum worked for students. I think it gave them a lot of respect often for the staff, and what the staff were doing, which was often invisible to faculty. It was like Housekeeping. George Leago, the guy who did Facilities for a long time, used to say, "We want to be like a shoe that doesn't squeak." A lot of times, the staff WERE the shoes that don't squeak. They just made things happen. I think that there was respect for that whole partnership that existed when many times people didn't fully understand there even was a partnership.

That's what I started to work on a lot fairly early on was I would go to faculty retreats, and I would talk about the curriculum. We started that conversation about the catalog, and I would come. Different people began to come to that, and they had different ideas about how the catalog worked and what it was for. I think faculty did get things from that. They learned a lot about their colleagues, some of which they may not have wished to know. [laughter]

Darney: You were in Advising until you moved to Student Employment, right?

Parker: Yeah, my dean and I just did not work well together, and it became time for me to move on. I applied for the opening of Director of Student Employment, and I got the job, which was really great.

Darney: When was that?

Parker: I was there for three or four years before it became clear Jerry had to retire and I retired at the same time. I can't remember when that was. Might have still been in the '90s. No, couldn't have been. Must have been in the 2000s sometime.

Darney: Because you were in Advising when I came into the deans.

Parker: Right. We had a great time.

Darney: I wanted to ask you about that, but a few more dates. When did you and Jerry get married?

Parker: 1995. Maybe around 2009 was when the two of us left the college.

Darney: When you were in Advising and I was a dean, you and Andrea Coker-Anderson, who was the Registrar, and I met weekly. I don't remember how that started. Do you?

Parker: Kind of, because I had been trying to work with the Curriculum Dean, and before you it was Pris Bowerman. Pris was very willing to talk about things, but it was a complete mystery why I wanted to talk to her. She only had a vague understanding about why that might be.

When you came, you got it right away, so I didn't have to force the moment about, "This program is doing this, and the catalog says that." I didn't have to find and make appointments to work on issues that were coming up for students because we met every week.

Darney: Because you heard about that from students who came in to Advising.

Parker: That's right. Or Andrea Coker-Anderson saw registration problems.

Darney: With the programs.

Parker: Exactly. This program is never filling. This program has a waitlist as long as your arm. All those kinds of things which have meaning for students, especially at Evergreen where it's going to be a one off, most likely. If you don't get it, it's hard, so what does the overall curriculum look like for people like that? Which I'm sure that all the Curriculum Deans have thought about, but then, when the rubber met the road, they didn't have a lot of information about that. They had some, and they could get it if they wanted it, but it wasn't part of the process for them, generally speaking.

Darney: One of the things that that brings up for me is this whole question of certification expertise kinds of things.

Parker: Professionalism?

Darney: Professionalism.

Parker: Boy, do I hate that.

Darney: Tell me about why you hate it.

Parker: When I was the Director of Advising, I used to try to hire people who had degrees in what I considered to be real content. I rarely hired somebody with a counseling background, but I was much more likely to hire a writer or an artist or a scientist, if I could get them, or somebody who had content, rather than a degree in student services. It's not that you can't learn and know things about student services, but there's no juice there, or limited juice. Really understanding about learning and thinking and growing and all that stuff, I think, is where your heart is in your subject.

Darney: Where you have something to help students think about or learn about.

Parker: Yes. Because it was Evergreen, and I came so early, I was part of, or heard a lot of conversations about—I think of it as subject and structure, kind of—how you teach it in a different subject, and how it all makes meaning. It was completely different from any of the schools I'd ever been to, as you know. To me, it just meant we had to pay attention to that, and we had to help students understand it, because it's a big transition. It was for me, and I didn't really get a lot of help.

I really came to be an art student, as many people do, or a science student or whatever, but I learned through the experience about the values of breadth, depth, and thinking about education. Just a lot of stuff, so probably all my years there were all about education, even though I was maybe studying art.

Darney: Because it strikes me, one of the things that happened in a lot of programs is that the faculty had a conception of how these disciplines would work together to answer a question, but they didn't often make that explicit to students.

Parker: Yeah, that's true.

Darney: For a lot of students, they got it by the third quarter, which is why one-year programs were important.

Parker: Exactly.

Darney: But some students didn't because it was never made explicit.

Parker: I think so, so they would think, well, this isn't going anywhere and I'm leaving after two quarters, and that was a shame because the penny would drop for a lot of young people. But also, I think, we got a lot of older students, and we got students who came from educational backgrounds. We had students who already had a big leg up in the academic world, so they could get it.

Then we became more and more students for whom it was the first generation. For a long time—I don't know what it is now—we were half first-gen students. They need a different kind of scaffolding. I think the whole center recognized that, and there was additional support for first gen. We talked a lot about those first-gen students and what they needed.

Darney: What did you do for them? How did you help them?

Parker: We mostly did advising, but we kept in mind that a first-gen student brings this with them, or doesn't bring it with them. But there was a grant-funded office for first-gen TRiO programs. What we did was we made referrals, but we also knew. We held it in our minds. I used to do a fair amount of professional development because it didn't exist for us, so we just made it happen.

Darney: You mean you provided it for your staff?

Parker: Yeah, and then sometimes for the whole center. I used to invite people from the different parts of the college to come and talk about what they do over in the Comm Building or something.

Sometimes we read a few books and talked about it. It was really fun. I had my teaching degree, and I did put it to use, but not where I thought I would. [laughing]

Darney: That's interesting. Because so often, as you know, students don't know what it is they're asking even. They just know that something's not working, or they're confused, or whatever.

Parker: Yeah. That's part of, I guess, what led to the workshop models that we developed over time. As they got to be more people, we got more students seeing them. Eventually, we invented for this workshop that we finally required everybody, because we knew what they were going to ask, so we were able to make that model. Let them ask everything and write it on the board, and then we just told them what we were going to tell them anyway. [laughing] Crossed it off as we went.

Occasionally, there was an outlier, but really rarely. A lot of people, they would have been required to come and they still didn't know that there was an Academic Advising Office. But I think we gave them a little jumpstart with that model.

Darney: Is this the TRiO students, or all students?

Parker: No, this was all students, freshmen and transfers as well.

Darney: You required this of them?

Parker: At one point, we did. It didn't work very well, as you can imagine. [laughter]

Darney: Then you offered it?

Parker: Yeah. It was fun. It really was. It was so fun just as a teacher to see their needs and our desire to meet those needs come to a perfect match.

Darney: How many worked in the Advising Office?

Parker: First, it was just me and Larry. Then, I think I told you the story about how I finally hired a work/study student?

Darney: No.

Parker: I was having a hell of a time. I could not get anybody. Financial Aid was in control of hiring and work/study funds and they managed it to match the funds. They wanted it to be fair to the offices and they wanted every student who got it to be able to get a job and earn it, but I was having a really hard time.

Finally, Leticia Nieto, who worked down the hall in Career Development, she said, “I know what to do. Go to the bookstore and buy a really beautiful piece of paper, and a pen with some gorgeous ink, and when you come back to your office, write a letter to the work/study student as if they were already there and you were writing them this letter of gratitude.”

Darney: Wow.

Parker: I know, so I thought, what the hell? Nothing else has worked, so I did that. Betty Ruth Estes, who was a science historian, was the faculty advisor during that time, and so I did what Leticia told me. She brought a silver bowl, and we all went out in the woods—and I made Betty Ruth come—and we stood in a circle and held hands, and we burned that letter in the silver bowl out under the trees. Betty Ruth could hardly stand still. History of science? Burn a letter. [laughter]

Sure enough, within a couple months, I got this work/study kid. He had his own business card, and it had his name, and it said afterwards AA, for his degree. The card really was because he was a Taro reader. I thought, man, you’ve got to watch what you ask for.

Darney: Right. [laughter]

Parker: But it broke the dam. I had a lot of student employees over time.

Darney: But in the whole office.

Parker: In the whole office, it crept up. Then there was a big budget cut, and they took the—what did we call that? cooperative education?—it was the internship office. The first person who had run it, whose name I’m spacing out right now.

Darney: Barbara Cooley.

Parker: Yeah, she had a stranglehold on it, from my perspective.

Darney: I know she did.

Parker: Changes had happened, and Jackie McClure had come, and she was the Director of that office. They combined Advising and the internship program, which was a little odd, but we made it happen. Jackie and I became very close friends. She became the Assistant Director, and I was the Director. It was interesting, and it helped bring to the notion of advising being more academic and helped bring the experiential part to that, and that’s one of the Five Foci, which I can’t remember if that happened before

or after we got merged. It was great, so we talked a lot more after that about the practice of your education.

Darney: Weren't there other advisors who weren't students and weren't faculty?

Parker: It was then the people who had been the internship advisors and the academic advisors, and we cross-trained everybody. Then I made everybody back up every program that was assigned. Like if you were in charge of the internships for the Legislature every year, yes, but you had to keep this person informed and in the loop. It was getting bigger, but still, if one person was gone, it was a big gap for us.

Darney: At what point was there an academic advisor assigned especially to first-year programs?

Parker: That was a program that Jackie McClure and I made up called Core Connectors. It was not only a faculty, but all of the Advising staff and the faculty members. Sometimes they would be assigned to more than one, but that was unusual, because it was usually a close match, really.

We just made this thing up where the advisor would go, and they were welcomed more or less, and they just helped keep that connection going. "Here's some support that you might not be aware of." Or "If you don't know what you're going to do next year, you should talk to your faculty, and if you need to know more about this, here's this, or if you're looking at a career . . ." so that we were helping make leakages, I think.

Some people brought their expertise, and they did some teaching in the programs. Joyce Stammets did storytelling with people. Stuff like that. For some connections, it was extremely fruitful. For some faculty, it was like, "Oh, gawd, you again. Could you sit over there?" So, it was a mixed bag, but it seemed worth it to me.

Darney: Even in the programs where they weren't particularly welcomed, did the students take advantage to them?

Parker: Some did. They became a face that was familiar, so you knew if you couldn't quite figure it out and you weren't able to talk to your faculty or something was going on or you didn't think they'd know, you could come and talk to that person. Students did come in. I think it was very effective. We presented it when you were at the Student Services carnival or whatever those things are. [laughter] People were impressed, and that was a nice feeling.

Darney: But it was based on the fact that you made that initiative.

Parker: Oh, yeah. Me and Jackie hatched it. Actually, it worked at Evergreen to some extent, but it wouldn't work at another college, because one of the keys is that it's a big program that lasts a long time, and that's the place where you are. Because if you were more connected to the math class, it's a whole different animal.

Darney: Right. How much of the successes that you had were based on your connections to faculty? Because it seems to me that you knew all the faculty, basically.

Parker: Pretty much. Again, it was not part of my job, at least in the beginning, but I really quickly saw that we needed more information. Keith and Mark used to call me the “info hog.” [laughter] I used to just go to the faculty meetings, or go to these events. I wasn’t invited, but nobody ever said, “What are you doing here?” I just did it, and it was fine. I gleaned a lot of inside information that way that was useful for students to know. “So-and-So’s going to be on sabbatical that year so you might want to do it in this order.” All kinds of little tidbits that began to make a difference.

I do think it did. Also, if you were working with a student and they were going to do a certain kind of thing, you could say, “I think you would be happier in this program that does that because it combines this,” or, “You might be a better match with this faculty,” things like that. That couldn’t have happened if I’d just stayed in the office.

Darney: Also, the fact that you’d been a student. That made a big difference.

Parker: I think that was absolutely key. I knew how it could be. And sometimes it had been less than perfect, so I knew that, too.

Darney: And how a student could either manage it or avoid it.

Parker: Yes.

Darney: What about in the time that you were in these various roles, did you see any changes in the relationship of faculty and staff, the working relationships?

Parker: I do think that I saw some of the beginnings of a certain silo process. In the very beginning—and I wasn’t there the first year, but I was here the second year—at one point, I don’t even remember exactly what started this, but the school shut down for two days to have conversations among itself—students, staff, faculty—on the fourth floor or even the first-floor lobby. Big spaces.

We had some conversations about education, people’s role in education, and about diversity. That was a long time ago, but it was coming up. It was interesting, and also, as a 21- or 22-year-old, it was also a mystery. But it was a fascinating conversation. The school was shut down to have a conversation. It just knocked my socks off.

Everybody came. I’m sure not everybody came, but from all areas, people did come, and did take part. It wasn’t like, oh, we’re not listening to students today. It was we’re all here together.

Over time, I think people go busier. Faculty had kids and divorces and stuff, and it seemed to me that over time it got harder for new people to get into the family that was Evergreen in the beginning. There’s nothing wrong with them. There’s nothing wrong with the faculty or anything. It

was that people had lives. They had to be at Little League, and they didn't have as much time as they had when they first came to welcome and embrace these new people.

The faculty retreats helped with some of that. It was quite a while later that they disappeared, but I'm sure you saw them changing also. How can you get to know who you want to teach with? It required certain people to have wonderful ideas that they could and go out and recruit. I just think that's been happening less and less and less. There are not the structures that allow for that.

We had to make a bunch of hard decisions. Every year, we were attacked by the Legislature, so I think the administration became busier and busier over here.

Darney: Defending the college.

Parker: Exactly. It was a lot of work. The faculty began to be older, and their lives became more different from their students, so I do think there was a loss there. For me, it seems like a loss. It's still probably better than so many places. It was just the normal thing.

Darney: When you think about your time in Advising, what are you proudest of?

Parker: I think I feel like we actually did help a lot of students. I'm proud that I made that work into work that was visible and respected, and people had a better understanding of what kind of scaffolding might be needed, and that we were part of the team for a lot of faculty. That seemed like what I think is appropriate, at least for Evergreen. Probably for other places, but I only had that one. It made me really sad when they gutted the Advising Center.

Darney: From my perspective, you played a big role in the social events, the extravaganzas, the things that faculty and staff put on. Tell me about some of those.

Parker: Okay. Almost from the beginning, people got together, and there would be—what was it?—the Pointless Sisters would come and sing, Karen Wynkoop and several staff women. But different people would come, and they would sing songs in harmony because they just liked to do it. Malcolm Stilson wrote a musical every year and we'd put that on. Then Doug Scrima, the director of Admissions took it on.

I always wanted to help with that, and it was a wonderful social glue. It made people play together, which was beginning to fade a little bit. For several years, Wendy Freeman and I put on a dance with some band from Tacoma that played oldies. In fact, the third time we put it on—and it was slightly terrifying because we had to make enough money somehow to pay the band. [laughter] I think they were probably really cheap.

One year Provost Russ Lidman called me up and he said, "I'd like to give you some money." But we were calling this the "attitude adjustment." It was a crappy time, so we just wanted to start the year

off with this fun bang. I said, “No, I’m sorry, I can’t take your money. The reason I can’t is because I don’t want the administration running this event. This is a grassroots event.” I think he was pretty startled. But clearly, we’ve made up since then. [laughing] That was a good one.

We used to have big going-away parties, like the one for Vice President for Student Affairs Gail Martin when she moved to Seattle to become the Provost at Antioch. That was pretty astonishing. This was during the time when we were trying to get it to be so that everything was not lockstep with all the colleges, and with grades and tests and everything, so there was quite a bit of stuff going on to not anti-test exactly, but just to enrich the way you might evaluate people.

I was on some committee with Don Middendorf, physics faculty, and because Sam Schrager, ethnography faculty, lived at my house, we got to talking about ethnography as an assessment tool. . We decided—and Steve Hunter funded this—that we would hire an ethnographer to do a chunk of our reaccreditation report.

Darney: Accreditation.

Parker: The accreditation thing. It was a hoot and a half. Gail retired during that time. The kid from UCLA, Peter somebody, was blown away by Evergreen and by the party. He wrote the ethnography for his PhD thesis. Gail came riding in on Pat Barte’s horse in the backyard of the Library Building. [laughter] Doug Scrima had written a play, I think it was *500 Vice Presidents on the Roof*, a musical. We had a fashion show. We had food. It was a spectacular and enormous and loving undertaking. Nancy Koppelman and I and some other people made her a quilt, which we hung up. Then Susan Hirst, from the Provost’s office, made a drawing of the quilt and people could sign where they donated fabric. We had some of Michael Beug’s plaid pants and one of his neon shirts. [laughter]

I’m telling you, that is a special thing. We worked as hard on playing as on working, and it felt really good.

Darney: Were you part of the Sandra Simon pet show?

Parker: I was not. [laughing] And I’m so sad.

Parker: It was pretty great.

Parker: I was part of a songfest that we sang for somebody else retiring, possibly Eddie Dornan. Dee van Brunt and Miss Ellie was there, so we were all standing up singing. Michael Beug came in and he said, “Oh, I’m sorry I didn’t make any of the practices, but do you want me to sing?” We said, “Oh, yes. You stand right behind us and make the same hand movements we’re making.” It was just so ridiculous. It was so much fun, because, of course, he didn’t really know anything. It just made it so much more fun. [laughter]

Darney: That's great. And Barbara Smith's. That's the only one I think I was part of.

Parker: Yeah, Barbara's with the chickens.

Darney: And the "Bar-Bar-Ba-ra," and the singing.

Parker: Hunter and I were among the stalwarts of those events.

Darney: Yes, you were. I think it's the sort of thing that you can't say, "We need to do these things because they're good for morale." It has to just happen. Right?

Parker: Yes, and they are good for morale, but if you say, "Here, do this for morale," I'm not coming.

Darney: Right.

Parker: But a storytelling fest, or a dance, or somebody performing, I'm there. I think pretty much that's gone, as near as I can tell. Too bad.

Darney: Too bad. It was a good, important time. When you moved to Student Employment, how was that?

Parker: How was that?

Parker: I did not want to leave Advising, but I just couldn't do it anymore. I was thinking about jobs, maybe at the Legislature. There wasn't really anything coming up at the college, until suddenly, this one came up. It was Hunter. He did hire me, and he did help me keep my salary up there—not at first.

But it was a new project, and I got their software. We made things easier. The person that I worked with was accustomed to coming in on the weekend before school started and stapling all the paper job announcements to the wall, and nobody could see them. I thought, what the hell? I got some software and let it rip, and I think it worked very well, both for the community and for students because anybody could post a job, even people off campus. "Come and weed my garden."

Darney: Oh, they weren't work/study?

Parker: Yeah, we had the work/study jobs there eventually, we had the internships there, and we had the paid non-work/study jobs. We had everything, because why not? Why would you have to go three places?

Darney: Did work/study jobs have to be authorized that a program could have a work/study job?

Parker: Yeah, there were layers. Employers got student workers with subsidized pay. The student's side was the student had to be awarded a certain amount of work/study funds that they could earn. They couldn't just receive it, they had to earn it, and sometimes they didn't quite understand.

Darney: You mean they didn't understand the work part of work/study?

Parker: Exactly. But we'd help them. Then the Financial Aid office, or after that, the Student Employment Office, would allot the jobs. They were being really fair and careful, but some people,

they'd advertise a job every damn year, and they'd never get a student—a horrible job, the word it out, I don't know what. It was kind of pointless, I thought, so I said, "Let people make these matches. This is good experience and it's real-life experience for them. Let them go look for a job." So, they did.

Darney: Those students then?

Parker: Any student, when I came. I just said, "Why are we doing it this way?" It got easier and more of a challenge both, I think. I was there three or four years, something like that.

Darney: What allowed you to see both the big picture and the details that were clogging things up?

Parker: Hmm. My learning style? [laughing] I don't know. I think maybe it's my curiosity. I like to know how things work, so if I saw a consequence, I would want to know why so I would see. I think I'm accustomed to thinking in the big picture, but then I like to know why, too, so I like both of those aspects. I never really thought about that.

And I got to be friends in the people in Registration, people in Admissions, the other people in my area, and everybody has a little piece of it.

Darney: But those personal contacts are both important and helpful and rewarding.

Parker: Yeah, all of the above. Even Steve Herman, who one day was yelling at me in Red Square about "Those administrators! Grr grr grr!" And I said to him, "I'm an administrator." He was just gobbled. [laughter] I was like, hey, think of this.

Some students did so well with him, and some students needed out right away. That was true for a lot of us. It was true for people who worked for me. He was just on the extreme end.

Darney: At the same time of all of this, you're still keeping up your art. You have all along?

Parker: Pretty much, yeah. Off and on. Sometimes I'd take classes. I've always had a little studio space somewhere. I just really like to make things. I thought I'd teach that, and in a way, I think now I'm glad that I didn't, because I think it makes you spend your art juice on your class rather than on your work.

Darney: Certainly, the energy, the whatever, the attention that it takes.

Parker: Yeah. I particularly admire Susan Aurand and Jean Mandeberg who have always kept their work going.

Darney: But they were also very careful about carving the space.

Parker: Exactly. I was not quite as boundary oriented as they. But I can't really help myself, to some extent.

Darney: You retired when Jerry did, and then cared for him until his death.

Parker: Yes.

Darney: Then what? What happened after that for you?

Parker: What did happen? My social life had pulled in quite a bit, although I did take Jerry to coffees with Dave Hitchens, and sometimes Charlie McCann would come, who I've always adored, and John Erickson, Susan Aurand's husband. Different people—Dan Ralph, Charlie McCann, Dave Hitchens, Tom Rainey—would come, so I'd get to see them.

But after Jerry was gone, it took me maybe a year to realize, if you're going to have a life, you'd better make one. Now, I'm much more involved. I have already been back to the DRC. I went to the DRC almost right after I retired—the Dispute Resolution Center—but I stopped for a while when it was too hard. Then, after he died, I went back. I like to stir that pot just as much as I stirred it at Evergreen.
[laughing]

Darney: Because you did a lot besides participating in dispute resolutions. You organized the record-keeping, Right? Something like that?

Parker: That was the third time I was able to participate in acquiring software for people who had outgrown their paper system, so I was getting fairly good at it by then. That was fun, and they appreciated it. But also, some people quit because they just couldn't go there.

Darney: Interesting.

Parker: The desks were piled with file folders with sticky notes on them, and sometimes, the sticky note for this folder was on the back of this other folder, and you wouldn't know what or why or when or where the folder was. They had so outgrown it.

Darney: I always thought of you as an early adapter of technology.

Parker: Shannon Ellie called me that, too. [laughing]

Darney: But you combined it with an understanding of how people wanted to use it, rather than just what the technology is.

Parker: Yeah.

Darney: Ways that it would be helpful for people.

Parker: User friendly, I think, is what they say.

Darney: Yes.

Parker: There's no point in having what the tech boys like because it won't do the job. It would screw everything up.

Darney: Right.

Parker: And I think we did a good job.

Darney: But that's that big picture, it seems to me, again, and the details that most people don't get both.

Parker: You lean one way or the other.

Darney: Right.

Parker: Forest and trees. Gotta have both. I guess that's just me.

Darney: Now you're more involved with the DRC.

Parker: Yeah, doing mediations and doing the intake process. I've been on the board. When you work, you have a structure enforced on your life, unless you are your own boss, and if you have clients, you have to make structure. I've needed that outside structure a little bit to keep going and not to fall into the black hole. It's been very good for me. I appreciate it very much. And now I'm going to work on the eviction program, too.

Darney: With the DRC?

Parker: Yeah.

Darney: The rental eviction program.

Parker: Yeah. We had a program for banks and foreclosures for a while when a lot of houses went underwater and stuff. The model closed down and it's reinventing itself as the rental eviction program. It's very important to me to feel useful.

Darney: Yeah. Are you involved in other community kinds of things?

Parker: Not really. I have a list of friends that I try to make sure I see and not fall away from. I have big family connections, stuff like that, but I don't have the other. Except for the coffee, I don't really have other structured social things.

Darney: Is there anything we haven't touched on that you wanted to talk about, about Evergreen or your life?

Parker: Yeah. One thing is that I really adored the Washington Center, and I was sad when it shrunk away. I thought it was one of the healthiest things we'd ever done, both for our own faculty and for the life, and I tried to be a part of that. I wish it would come back.

Darney: Was the Advising Center affiliated with them officially or just informally?

Parker: No, it was informal. I think it might be of historical interest—I don't know if they still do it, I think they do—that they have a staff representative to the Board of Trustees.

Darney: Oh, right.

Parker: I served as that one time, one year. It's a lot of work to be heard, or at least it was, and I suspect that continued to be the case because people don't fully understand what they can do as that person, that connector. Particularly when Joe Olander was President, it really made me see how the Board of Trustees gets their information primarily from one person.

Darney: Especially if that's what that one person wants.

Parker: Exactly. They have a lot of control over it. But during Joe's tenure was the year that I was the Board Representative, and because I was that representative, and because people had no idea how little impact it made, people would come and complain to me, and I would get phone calls from schools in Texas and other places he'd worked.

Darney: Because they knew of your role.

Parker: They knew of my role. It must have been on the Web, or who knows what. Eventually, I began to feel that as the representative, I needed to say something, so I wrote this letter trying to explain what people's concerns were. Not taking them on myself but trying really to represent what I was hearing.

I did that, and I probably typed it, and printed it at Evergreen. I was shaking with anxiety about doing it, about delivering it. It was like Deep Throat. "I'll meet you here and you can give me the letter." "Really?"

But that happened and that was a really difficult time. Part of the reason it was such a challenge is that Dave Hitchens was the faculty advisor, and Dave Hitchens and Betty Ruth Estes and Craig Carlson were in the Advising Office a lot, and they were talking about it, and working on it, and huffing about it. I think it leaned more heavily than it might have otherwise on me.

Darney: Because you were aware of what they were doing.

Parker: Yeah. I just think that was a really interesting time.

Darney: You gave it to the Board.

Parker: And I never heard a thing.

Darney: Interesting.

Parker: Which is fine. Larry Savage, who was the typewriter repairman but became a police officer, would say sometimes, "Yeah, there's places I know of on campus where you can scream, and nobody will hear you." It's like, I do not want to hear that.

Darney: Larry Savage?

Parker: Larry Savage, yes. That contributed to my extreme jitters over doing a thing like this. But I just thought I had to do it.

Darney: You did that before . . . ?

Parker: Joe was still there.

Darney: Before those three brought up their research?

Parker: It probably would have been overlapping, because all of it went on for quite a while, really. People's complaints, and then the money and time spent on the Japanese garden at the President's Residence, and grabbing women in the halls, and all that stuff about his resume.

Darney: There were sexual harassment suits against him, weren't there?

Parker: Which I think almost nobody knew anything about. I didn't really know that there were suits until some years later. I knew that he had grabbed a couple of my friends, but I didn't know that there were suits.

Darney: Every time I met him in the hall, I stuck my hand way out, so he'd have to shake it instead of hugging me.

Parker: There you go. You figured that one out. There is one thing I treasure about him. Do you remember a student—he was truly crazy—who lived in Housing? Arthur West. He was always suing the College on technicalities. He would sometimes come to school wearing this old canvass backpack, and in the backpack sticking out would be a piece of firewood and an empty gas can. You didn't know it was empty, but a gas can.

Darney: Wow.

Parker: One thing he also wore was an enormously long knitted stocking cap that trailed on the floor behind him quite a ways. It was very, very long.

Darney: A train.

Parker: Yeah. This was a guy I liked in a weird sort of way. I always wanted to see what he was going to do, but also, I didn't want to be alone with him. [laughter] One day, as Arthur was heading toward the bathroom, so was Joe, and he was wearing the very long hat, Joe purposely stepped on the tail of the hat and pulled it off. I was so sorry I didn't get to see it, but it made the rounds. [laughter] That was nice.

There were other things, and I did often know a lot of stuff where people were in trouble. I had to write a letter to a faculty and say, "You may not talk to anybody in my office except me," because she had come and abused the staff while she was drunk. Don't do it. That's not okay. So, there was the dark side as well, occasionally.

Darney: Yeah, that's the consequence of being involved in a lot of parts of the college.

Parker: Yes. It was good that she was coming to us, good she knew about us, but you're not going to abuse the staff.

Darney: You don't treat the staff that way.

Parker: That's right. And also, don't come to work drunk.

Darney: That was a very common occurrence.

Parker: Yeah, I'm afraid it is, or was with her. I don't know what I heard. I heard she got sober and moved somewhere else. I hope that's true. It's a hard thing to kick.

Darney: Anything else?

Parker: Not right now. But on the steps.

Darney: Yeah, let me know on the steps. Great. Thank you, what fun.

Parker: It was. It was great.

Darney: You were just there in a whole lot of things, in a lot of parts of the college for a lot of time.

Parker: I think that was the nugget of Evergreen. "Well, go do it." Like Jeannie Chandler when she was pregnant, she said, "We don't seem to have a policy about pregnancy," and the guy said, "Go write it." That was a magical time to be able to really create that place, and I know I like creating. And it felt much more like a team or even a family.

Darney: Did you ever go with the Wild Water Women, any of those things?

Parker: I never did. They were not in my loop, I guess, but they sounded healthy and happy and joyful.

Darney: Really amazing, right. Thank you very much.

Parker: We did it!