Interview 1

Ronald Magden

June 3, 2013

Notes

The archival original of this interview is in two parts. For ease of use by researchers, the two parts have been edited into one video file and subsequently one audio file and one transcript. This transcript has also been lightly edited by TCC Archivist A.J. Demeter to match the style of the others from this project and to remedy name spelling, misheard/missing words, and other minor corrections, 12/2024.

Content Note

This interview includes use of the N word on page 18, and uses some outdated language for disabilities throughout.

Summary

In this interview with original faculty member Ronald Magden, he describes the early days of the college, its impact on the community, significant people in the college's history, and the ways that it changed over the years. Notable moments in TCC history include the creation of the college and first day of classes, the move from the school district to the community college district, Black student organizing, the faculty strike, the TCC program at McNeil Island Penitentiary. Magden also discusses his work as a historian with labor unions and business leaders, including writing books on the longshoremen and Selden Furniture, and helping the University of Washington start the Endowed Chair for Labor Studies.

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INTERVIEWER RACHEL PAYNE: Alright, could we start with having you say and then spell your name?

RONALD MAGDEN: Yeah, I'm Ronald Magden, R-O-N-A-L-D M-A-G-D-E-N.

INTERVIEWER: When did you get involved with TCC, as a student, administrator, or faculty?

00:00:17

MAGDEN: May of 1965. I was sent by the president of Green River Community College, Mel Lindbloom, to see John Terrey about a job at a planned community college, Weyerhaeuser Community College. It didn't get lined up to get to be the Weyerhaeuser community college because he wouldn't give the land. But they did buy the land, and in May I came to interview for a position at Tacoma Community College.

INTERVIEWER: And what was that position? What was your first job here?

00:01:03

MAGDEN: I taught history, and general studies. The idea was to have an academic transfer program, and a program fitting the technical arts, people those who were going into special technologies at Bates, and in the community. And John Terrey wanted to try a new approach to community college education with a general background of English literature, history, and that was called general studies. And I taught two sections of history and one of general studies. I tried-- we tried many things. I, in fact, John Terrey and I, team taught the general studies class for two years, worked hard to see if it'd work, had very little cooperation from the vocational school.

INTERVIEWER: What was the climate in our country like at the time when you started working at TCC?

00:02:18

MAGDEN: In '65 it was the glorious opening of the community college in the area, all over the United States, the movement was one of the greater expectations by people that were going to be held down or frozen to 8 to 5 jobs, it was a chance to enhance their learning and to have higher-skilled jobs. Tacoma was famous for being the factory city of workers, of dead-end jobs, and the coming of the college signified that there was a chance for growth in other ways. One of the most significant groups in

the early year or years were married housewives coming back to start their education while their kids were in school so that they could go ahead and become teachers and receptionists, professional people. So the whole movement in Tacoma changed from simply unskilled jobs to skilled jobs and maybe that's the history over the last 50 years in the community.

INTERVIEWER: And as a faculty member did you share that optimism that was…

00:03:49

MAGDEN: Yeah, that I did. Yeah, I taught in Renton ten years before I came to Tacoma and Renton's very similar to Tacoma, dominated by the Boeing airplane company and worker-oriented city just like Tacoma and you can see the stultification there, they couldn't rise up to the engineering level, that kind of thing. The education was not there and the incentive was not there. One of the great parts about starting Tacoma Community College was the great hopes that the people who came here to make a run at it, they couldn't afford UPS or PLU, they could get started here, they could get into a track where they could get scholarships or that kind of thing. As I said, an era of great hope, great expectations. Not only for the students graduating from high school, another very large group of people who had graduated who were stuck so to speak and wanted to get ahead, and that group were in their 20s and 30s, and they partied with the faculty at the Cloverleaf. It was… I might say in the very beginning there was no distinction between the 11 staff, the 32 faculty, administration. There wasn't any negotiations, there weren't any problems internally, John Terrey selected the faculty very, very well. From youth to experience the people who could carry the college, and did. And John always said, "the faculty is the continuity of this, presidents will come and go," and they did. Faculty is the very basic factor in the education of the students. And they have to be continuous.

INTERVIEWER: What was the mission of the college in the early days?

00:06:11

MAGDEN: You know that's very interesting, I tried to make sense out of the current one that is posted in the faculty building and its [pedigrees?]. The mission of the college was to serve students… Let's see, how's the best way to phrase it. It was… The input, that I found when I came here, was very particularly directed at serving handicap students. We had 19 people who had been blinded by, at birth by a peculiar… they had put in their eyes something – and they were wanting to going on to college, and so… And the school district had a marvelous reputation for compassion with the handicap. Both the developmentally disabled and physically disabled, and it

became known nationally as the "stepless college" in its early years. It was a definite effort to the wheelchair people, not only for students, for faculty, it was extremely important. Because the military had posted people to Tacoma because they knew the school district had an excellent mainstream program, [clears throat] and that carried over to the college, wish I could remember the doctor's name that inspired that, but another person – he's gone now – Bob Evans designed the college to meet the needs of the handicap students. There was no student union center because it was considered to be a school that would never need one. That they would be commuter students that came here. And some of that has gone on by the wayside, I viewed with sadness the passing of the stepless college concept when it happened. I was the advisor to the Blind Club. TACID [Tacoma Area Coalition of Individuals with Disabilities] is an outgrowth of that early movement, still. And I did coordinate the placement of that school here, or not school but building. So there was this strong commitment in the college, it's mission was to serve all students, underlining all is meaning handicapped, and particularly to take those who had rejected high school, had quit – Tacoma had a terrible 40% dropout rate – and we opened the doors for those students here and a lot of them made it, and it was worth the run.

INTERVIEWER: So going back to stepless college concept, were we basically then handicapped-accessible before the Americans with Disabilities Act passed?

00:09:30

MAGDEN: Mhmm. Absolutely. I think Tacoma was way out in front of every school district in the state on its commitment to the handicapped. And I believed in that strongly when I came here. And that's why I came here, [main point?].

INTERVIEWER: You came here because you had a commitment to handicapped accessible college?

00:10:03

MAGDEN: I had two handicapped children. And I, maybe it's a personal anecdote, I'd known John Terrey since 1951. We worked on a program called "The Pull Together." And it was a Saturday session once a month and we would bring ideas there. I was teaching junior high at the time and we would try out these ideas and talk about them at this "pull together" meeting. We did that for maybe 10 years together, and it became a very close association. There were probably two dozen teachers of all different groups that were involved in that.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So, just to go back to the beginning, can tell me a little bit about how the community college system was born. It was born in the sixties, and we were a part of that.

00:11:04

MAGDEN: Yeah, it was born with House Bill 1004, 1961.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the state or federal house?

00:11:12

MAGDEN: State. The state under the leadership of Pearl Wanamaker, she was out of office but she wanted the community colleges established here as schools that would provide skilled working people, rather than, as I've just suggested, the dead-end method that was in affect before that time. She was a marvelous woman, carried the legislature in her purse. Said and it's true. Very controversial woman. And I worked with John supporting her in every way possible. She put in the pension system, she put in collective bargaining, she put in the community college movement. She believed that everybody should have a chance. That's what—And I have a film of the dedication of the library to her and I'm very sad that her plaque is gone.

[Conversation with person off camera about the plaque.]

INTERVIEWER: So, can you talk about how the college system has developed, I mean TCC now we're coming up on our 50th year, have we stayed true to our mission? Are we still an open door serving people?

00:12:57

MAGDEN: No, you've changed the mission entirely. I don't recognize the mission at all. To me, the current mission is I could read that in 26 other community colleges, I don't see the uniqueness of this institution as it was. I don't mean to be sour grapes, but old people like me tend to have a frozen mind. I think it's kept pace with the times. I think it's very well received in the community. I know… I've taught 16,000 students here. I know-- I see them everyday in every way in the community and how happy and proud they are that they came here because they got their chance. But I don't see the mission statement as important as it was.

INTERVIEWER: But the basic idea that the college is open for everyone do you think stayed the same?

00:13:52

MAGDEN: I think that's called the open door and they have stayed true that mission, that is the mission of 3,000 community colleges, the open door.

INTERVIEWER: So looking into the future, maybe 30 years from now do you think America will still have open door community colleges that everyone can afford?

00:14:09

MAGDEN: No, they'll ossify like the senior institutions and some of them like Bellevue can hardly wait to ossify, and structure and I think become redundant. And I don't mean that to be sour grapes, I think that's natural. I got the opportunity, thanks to John, to teach at the University of Buffalo and I'm-- this is a wonderful institution in NY, god, as good as you get, but it was ossified up until the end. You know, and I just think like the "pull together" days you need to keep innovating and changing that kind of thing, and I think community college system of all the institutions has to be the most malleable. And I don't know, and I see faculty and maybe sometimes Boards that want to make that an end in itself, which it should never be. And 30 years from now, the technology changes so great, so huge that no one can predict, you know. But we ran the first television program here in 1965, [1] at McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary. We got a grant from Senator Magnuson to offer the first course and the interesting part about that was that every course we offered there for the inmates we had to offer for the guards. And we did that.

OFF CAMERA: And Ron, you taught class there for quite a while.

MAGDEN: Yes I did, for 11 years.[2]

INTERVIEWER: We are going to go onto your personalized questions now, that was just believe or not just the general ones.

RON: Oh my god.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so we are going to start with kind of at the beginning…

OFF CAMERA: I have to go.

MAGDEN: You can't leave me, Scoop [laughs]. I thought you retired.

[background conversation removed due to discussion of personal health information]

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[1] The McNeil program started in 1966, which Magden cites correctly in the rest of the interview.
[2] The McNeil program ran from 1966 to 1980, a total of 14 years. It is likely that Magden taught in the program for that full length of time.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so we are going to start with your history in the college and kind of just move…

MAGDEN: Alright.

INTERVIEWER: So why did you choose to become a historian and an educator?

00:16:25

MAGDEN: Well I was a historian in 3rd grade. I loved history. I sold newspapers on street corners or sell a newspaper I read it. And if a guy wanted to talk about sports I knew what was on the sports page, or the editorial page. And I started selling newspaper in 1935, I was 9 years old. I had a corner, and I sold for six years. And I would help other students in class, starting in 3rd and 4th grade, and continued that. I still do that, in the neighborhood. Love it. And so I knew then that I loved history my father said, you ain't going to make any money you better get—he was in the slot machine business, I said I don't want money to be a major part of my life so that should explain it. I started teaching at 21, Indian reservation in Idaho. And, three years there. And then, came to the University of Washington graduate school, loved that, boy, I ate that up. Got a doctorate, I was expected to move after I got it. I could have gone to University of Alaska or the University of Mexico. We had two sons who were handicapped, one profoundly autistic, Tacoma offered programs nobody else offered. So we came. And I don't mind telling you how I thought it was interesting. I told my major professor that Tacoma had what we needed for our boys, they were 4 and 6, and he said, I know somebody on the school board there I'll call them. And he called Fred Haley and Fred Haley called Angelo Giaudrone, the superintendent, and Giaudrone called me, first phone call in ten years in Renton that I ever had and I went down and Angelo said if you want the job you can have it.

INTERVIEWER: Was the with the Tacoma School District or with TCC?

MAGDEN: Yeah. And that was for TCC.

INTERVIEWER: What year was that?

MAGDEN: '65.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so that's how you came to TCC then?

00:18:58

MAGDEN: That's how I came to TCC. I showed up for the interview and the guy turned, the personnel director turned his back and didn't say anything. I sat there

and nothing happened, and I got up and left, and John had been appointed Dean of Instruction he called and said what the hell are you doing? I said, he wasn't saying anything to me we weren't doing anything, I said, I thought I flunked the interview, so I got up and left. He says, what are you-- get your ass back and let's get it done, he says we can't hire you without you going through your interview and so anyway, I came back and it was Angelo.

INTERVIEWER: So you were interviewed by Tacoma School District personnel?

00:19:48

MAGDEN: I had to go through Tacoma Public School's personnel department to get the job.

INTERVIEWER: Was that because TCC was still technically part of Tacoma School District at the time?

MAGDEN: Yes, yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Can you talk about that a little bit, about how they detached from the school district?

00:20:03

MAGDEN: That's one of the worst moments in the history of the college. And I have written that, there's… That story is fraught with all… I had worked in the legislature for the Renton school district with [the] superintendent, I worked with Oliver Hazen. I went with him, I admired him, I really liked him. And he was fair, honest, his books were open, you could look at anything, he wasn't going to try to play games with you. It was the days of Pearl Wanamaker and collective bargaining. And John was there, John was always there. And, we worked to the legislature to advance the cause of education in general. It was a very wonderful era. Anyway, I knew the opposition to the birth of Tacoma Community College, because Oliver Hazen took me there to testify that Renton should have a vocational school and not a community college. And I supported that. And I supported it because it was a community of unskilled workers. And I wanted to see them trained technologically in a vocational school. I had no problem with that, but a lot of people did. And in Tacoma, Verne Bates had extremely strong ties with the legislated delegation. And they were, before I even got here, I knew about Verne and his opposition in the community college movement and what was going to happen. I knew Verne in Spokane, Washington when he was teaching printing. He was a close friend with my mother's. He ate at the restaurant where she worked. I sat with him, I talked with him, I knew his mentality. "We're not going to

take the dumb bunnies after the community colleges are taking them." And I got a very… interview with him with expletives all over the place after three shots of whiskey. I drank with [him], here, we went back… and I danced on his grave.

INTERVIEWER: So Verne Bates was sort of the leader of the opposition--

00:22:43

MAGDEN: He was the leader of the opposition to House Bill 1004.

OFF CAMERA: He's the guy that founded Bates.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

OFF CAMERA: That was in the forties.

INTERVIEWER: So can you tell me a little bit about the people who managed to get TCC founded anyway, who are the ones that--

00:22:58

MAGDEN: [Larry] Faulk,[3] the only one. In the legislature. Only one, only friend… that wanted the college built. Dan Evans. Dan Evans is the one who went out a recruited the votes, outside of the Pierce County area, to create the college. Dan Evans was here at almost every major crisis in the early years. And he saw to it the funding of this college, because the Pierce County delegation were going to cut it so severely it couldn't exist. They dumped three bond issues in a row here. That's the kind of power Verne had.

INTERVIEWER: And it's my understanding that the Tacoma School District actually bought the land for the college and it sort of got taken away from them? And they were pretty angry about that?

00:23:49

MAGDEN: Oh… that's bullshit. And I was here involved in all of that, in it personally.

[3] Larry Faulk was elected to the Washington state Senate in 1966 and was a supporter of the legislation that created the current community college system (moving the CCs out of the school districts), however, he was not involved in TCC history yet during its formation in and before 1965.

OFF CAMERA: I can tell you where, Rachel, where the land came from. It came from different sources, some from the Park District, some from Weyerhaeuser land, the District though…

00:24:10

MAGDEN: I visited with George Weyerhaeuser on the purchase of the property of this, where the deal would have been if he'd have given the land they would name the college after him, and he wouldn't do it. And so, the next step from that was that George… There is more to that story that should be told. In conjunction with his opposition, to giving the land, that man put $60,000 a year into the McNeil Island education program for TCC with one condition, that nobody know about it.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

MAGDEN: And I did the transfer of that, the money came not from Weyerhaeuser Foundation but from the Weyerhaeuser Company. And it was strictly for tuition, and they had raffles at McNeil Island to see who could get in on the free tuition.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, and we will get to McNeil in a minute. But, let's start with, what's the first class you taught at Tacoma Community College?

00:25:23

MAGDEN: History 111, 8 o'clock in the morning. John Terrey taught poetry at 7:30, he was the first teacher, the first class. And September 22nd, 1965.

INTERVIEWER: And what did the campus look like when you first arrived?

00:25:41

MAGDEN: The Boeing Company, no, the Weyerhaeuser Company was blading the top soil with tree salt and I filmed it and a guy came over and says you can't film this. And I said why not? I said, it's public property isn't it? Not yet, he said. And they proceeded to take all the top soil to Federal Way.

INTERVIEWER: And but when the college opened--

MAGDEN: And it made me mad. I thought that was a dirty trick.

INTERVIEWER: [Laughs] When the college opened how many buildings were there? Were there trees?

00:26:13

MAGDEN: There was one.

INTERVIEWER: One building?

MAGDEN: One classroom, Building 15, and every president renumbers the buildings so I don't know what its number is now.

OFF CAMERA: It's the one right next door to here, which used to be *18*.

MAGDEN: [Laughs].

OFF CAMERA: Now I don't know what number it is.

00:26:30

MAGDEN: Yeah, they even named with trees one time. It didn't stick.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Let's see, we already did the stepless college…

00:26:41

MAGDEN: First day is on film, you can see it. I filmed the classrooms, there was a little bar that served as a [laughs] coffee bar. We were in a portable, we were not in faculty buildings. The bathrooms didn't have lights, we used flashlights. It was that bad.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. So when you first got here, what were some of the aspects of your involvement with the college? Were you just involved as faculty or were you involved with the politics of the organization?

00:27:15

MAGDEN: Yeah, I was president of the faculty.

INTERVIEWER: From what year?

MAGDEN: I can't remember, '65. And then Jack Hyde took over after. I couldn't take it anymore. One of the psychology teachers said, I won't teach at 8 o'clock in the morning, I've got seniority, I don't want to start until 9 or 10 and I want to go 10, 11, and 12. I said no, I said we're going to rotate, everybody's going to take the 8 o'clock sometime during the quarter. He said, I'm never going to talk to you again. And he didn't. And he stayed here 30 years.

[person off camera names the teacher, inaudible]

MAGDEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So what were some of the hardships the college faced in the early years--

00:28:02

MAGDEN: The hardest part was the poor students. Getting the money to get the tuition. And it became, more than… It became as big a mission as the mission of the college. And we had a wonderful minister named Reverend Long, and he went out and collected money, in the community, not only the business community but hither and yon, and if you called him and tell him you had a student that needed tuition and books, he would say, he'd take care of it. And he would call, I can't remember her name, first name, Williams, in the registrar's office, and he apparently had a blank check, I don't know how the hell he did it, but anyway we did that, for…

INTERVIEWER: And what was tuition like back then?

00:28:57

MAGDEN: I think 30, was it, 35…it's in the book. I think it was around fifty bucks.

INTERVIEWER: For a year? Or a quarter?

MAGDEN: Quarter.

INTERVIEWER: And how was the state support back then, did the state support the—

00:29:08

MAGDEN: Terrible [laughs].

INTERVIEWER: Was it?

MAGDEN: [Laughs] Yeah, we were living off, in those days the tuition money stayed with the institution. And didn't go into the general fund and they gave us wide latitude. And it depended on how smart a business manager you had. George Van Mieghem was a conniver and… I don't know exactly how to say this, we were always trying to chase the money with him. Bob [Barky?] and I were negotiating that time. George was always hiding the money in contingency accounts, and we had no trust

there, it was a real problem. They liked to travel. [Laughs] Jeez. And that led… it was under Jack Hyde that it really got bad.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so switching gears here, how's the library grown through the years and--

[interrupted by off camera—Magden wanting more coffee]

00:30:13

MAGDEN: The library, you know where it's located on this campus?

INTERVIEWER: Building 7?

MAGDEN: Where is it located?

INTERVIEWER: Um, on the north center.

MAGDEN: It was in the center. It was to be the central building and the faculty were really pushed to have John, John was a hell of a Dean of Instruction. You had to be busy, you had to use the library. But the library started a year before the college. Mr. Skagen, Morris Skagen and Doreen Faure and Lorraine Hildebrand, Elaine Saucier…

[interrupted with a drink]

MAGDEN: Oh thank you. Oh you're a good man. I'll see you soon, okay you bet.

00:31:03

MAGDEN: Lorraine Hildebrand and anyway, those people, I think I described it earlier. We took the books in print and cut it up in pieces. I got the social science, Bob Rhule got the English and literature, Russ Clark got the science and we ordered the books. The basic collection.

INTERVIEWER: Was it named after a person, the library? Was the library named after a person?

00:31:33

MAGDEN: Pearl Wanamaker.

INTERVIEWER: Who is that?

MAGDEN: And a terrible, controversial day that the people who hated her came to fight it, and those who loved her… Creator of the community college system.

OFF CAMERA: She was the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

MAGDEN: Yes she was. And very-- well you can tell which side I was on. And, but there were people that really hated her. They showed up, and it's on film. But the point is that we named the library after her. Before she was still ambulatory, she came once a year to sit at her desk. She had a special desk in the John Binns Room which you've since subsequently renamed somebody else. Anyway, she was very proud that the library's named after her. And she came often and I'd always have to scurry up find the, "where the hell did you hide the desk?" We had to.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So what were, what was your reaction and some other people's reactions when TCC came under the purview of Washington state?

00:33:00

MAGDEN: I was overjoyed, I was there. It was one o'clock in the morning. It was in a joint session in the Senate and the House, and it came down to, I think there were 23 colleges that were cheering and the Tacoma delegation was sitting there glumly. And a man named Fred Haley got up and he gave a speech called "The High School Without Ash Trays," very famous speech. And that speech was published in the *P.I.* but not in the *News Tribune*. And it was the story of the independence of Tacoma Community College, it was, that was what it was all really about.

INTERVIEWER: Did the *News Tribune* not support it, is that why they didn't publish the story?

00:33:48

MAGDEN: Well you're going to talk to Dale Wirsing, ask him. What kind of pressure the news-- You see the newspaper had to get along. This was a labor town. Tacoma very heavy AFL-CIO, and the *News Tribune* had to get along with that fact. And one time the AFL-CIO Central Labor Council got mad at the *News Tribune* and 700 people unsubscribed one day. They got the message. And so they don't tempt-- you can't win, maybe, with labor, but boy you better not lose them. So, the upshot of that was that Tacoma Community College got embroiled in that. And it really was-- And they used to send a hit man, Bruce Brennan, to tell us not to buy typewriters and all that crap. It was flowing back and forth, at all times, and Tom Ford was trying to walk this tight rope between the domination [inaudible] Slim Rasmussen who that hated TCC with a passion. And worked us over every time he could. And I paid him back, I became the

campaign manager for Gordon Johnson who ran against him for mayor and beat him. It was a pleasure I'll always enjoy. And after it was over, Slim opened his drawer and got out a bottle of whiskey and passed it to me. He wanted to say, it's over, you know. We're not going to fight this continuously. It's dividing the labor movement; you're in too strong with the longshoremen.

INTERVIEWER: Right. And speaking of the longshoremen, that's a topic you've written about extensively, can you talk about how you got involved in that?

00:35:44

MAGDEN: Oh yeah. That is again a part of… This longshoreman, nicknamed the "Grand Conniver," Phil Lilly, went to a Humanities Committee meeting, and he talked them out of $45,000 to do a book. And I had done a dozen humanities programs for, through TCC and the Kettering Foundation and a whole bunch of other… We were, we had a monthly television program on Channel 11, you know, was it monthly or weekly? Monthly maybe…

OFF CAMERA: Thought it was monthly.

MAGDEN: Monthly. Anyway, the guy who was in charge of the humanities, he called and he said, "Ron, this guy, we gave him 45 grand to do a book and he really doesn't know how to do a book," and I had worked with the humanities council on books, articles, that kind of thing. And so I went down to meet him and I was, I don't know, awestruck by this guy. He was, he could outsmart employers, his fellow union members [laughs], he was a brilliant mind. He brought huge shipping lines to Tacoma. He really ran the waterfront, and he wanted the story of the waterfront told by the union perspective. And so he, and I said, well I think we need to talk about a scholarship program and I said I'd help with the book. And he said, "How much are we talking about?" And I said, maybe $25,000, some of it spread at McNeil, and then we were also running McChord and Fort Lewis at the time, I wanted that money in a [inaudible] kitty. And he said, "Well we can go get that from the port." I said, the port? [Laughs] they don't give scholarships! "Oh yes they do!" [Laughs] Well anyway, to make a long story short, I did the book, I found it incredible, the inner workings… And it took me right into the heart of Tacoma, and the union movement, and the employers, and how they worked, they solved problems here without striking and going out. That was an interesting, whole process. First book took seventeen months. I did it with a fellow who started here, Art Martinson, and went on to PLU. That's one thing about the faculty that has to be said before I forget it, we had a tremendous number of ABDs – All But Dissertation – they would come here, they would write their dissertation and they would move on. The first ten years was a regular parade of

young people, oh boy, it was wonderful. They had great ideas, new ideas, new thoughts, up to date information on how to work English curriculum. Oh jeez, it was great. And these guys, and women – and there was as many women as there were men – were coming through here and dropping these ideas off for two or three years, finishing their dissertations and going on to a senior institution. We were a ladder, it was very obvious after the first couple years, we were going to have a faculty that-- John could speak to this so much better than I could, and he wanted those people. He wanted, "Magden, you've taught history for...," god, by the time I got here I'd taught it for like fifteen years. You're out of the time, you don't keep current with the latest research. Anyway, that kind of thing. We had these young people.

INTERVIEWER: And so how did the hiring structure work back then, were they adjuncts or were they full-timers?

00:40:03

MAGDEN: They were full-time. And the hiring procedure, you need to know the anecdote about it, this is funny anyhow. I participated in a lot of the hiring, because I was president of the faculty and they would not, they wanted the faculty brought along with these new people. They didn't want people dumped in the teaching, they wanted them to be inclusive, that everybody was to be a part of all this. And so I participated in the hiring. And I know you're going to do Frank Garratt, his may be the most important one of all. When it came time, we had the English position open, he was in Illinois, I don't know what he, I think he was finishing his masters, and the only thing that came through was that he was in a wheelchair, and the personnel department at the school district said "No, he won't be able to see the students in the back, they'll be, they won't learn," and this kind of thing. And I thought, what's this guy talking about? I said, I've worked with teachers in wheelchairs, that's nonsense. You know, if you have to build a ramp or something then fine. I said, jeez his credentials are good, his recommendations are good, I said, he's got a master's degree in English, what are we talking about? And there was a symbol, when we weren't going to hire somebody, and the discussion was over, John would point his thumb down, that meant, hire him. And if he pointed it up it meant goodbye and you went outside and you talked to the candidate who was sitting there, and gently tell him that he wasn't coming here. And recommended he go Pierce College, we practically populated the faculty at Pierce. That's true. Because Pierce paid less. Anyway, that was the… those were the signals used. And I wanted John, when he came to tell you about the hiring, I brought the list, we spent two days discussing it. It'll have to be another time.

INTERVIEWER: And then, also in the late sixties there was some unrest with the students, and they ended up painting a rock kind of back and forth during the night and everything, can you talk about that a little bit?

00:42:34

MAGDEN: It actually spread from the University of Washington. And actually led by a Tacoma Community College student who went up there. [Walter Shannon.] [Walter Shannon] was working as an Atlas Foundry – what the hell do they call it – with the, in the street, those manhole covers. And I was teaching a night class and he was in it, and he was… really radical, ready to change the world. One of ten children, Black, Japanese, Cherokee, was his background. And he wrote a paper I will never forget, marvelous paper. And I thought he cheated, it was so marvelous, I said, this was too good. And I didn't mind his radicalism, I thought that it showed… And he showed me a paper, "Students are N----rs." It was a marvelous paper about going to the bathroom and signs in the faculty buildings saying "Students Stop Here," all that crap. Anyway, he was upset about all that, and the University of Washington had a Black group, I can't remember the name of it right now, and he went up there and got the paperwork that they were using against the president of the University of Washington and they were [reading] Red Square, it was massive riot center, and Tacoma Community College students got involved in that. And then, the Blacks. And then they came down here. The student body president was a man named Kegler, Bill Kegler, right, and he wrestled with that for days, trying to see the right way. And one day, the Blacks painted the rock out front of the science building black. And there were white students that, I don't know if it's absolutely true, but there were police cadets that painted it white. And then the two by fours showed up and the fist fights started. And they got up on the rock; the Blacks would get up on the rock during the noon hour, then the whites would follow them, and there would be this… screaming, yelling fight. And one day it boiled over and they took apart Building 22. And… I was in the next building trying to keep them from getting there. Frank was in Building 22 and I got really nervous when I heard the building start to, being destroyed. And I went over and Frank was sitting there quiet and they weren't bothering him. There was, they were tearing the other end of the building apart. But they wouldn't go where he was. And so I—And there was another guy, teacher, Roland Evans, who was screaming, yelling anti-Black stuff. And so anyway, that building suffered and at the same time, there were, somebody took a pistol and shot out some of the windows in the president's office.

INTERVIEWER: Was anyone injured in that incident?

00:46:38

MAGDEN: Not that I know of. I filmed it.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. So, were the tensions between the Black students and the white students, did they have to do some policies at the college or were they just related to larger social issues?

00:46:53

MAGDEN: No they had to do with Vietnam. They had to do with who was going to do the fighting. If you're in school, you didn't have to fight. There were Blacks – and whites – who rejected that policy and stood on the rock about it. And there were fanatics who threw coke bottles because Coca-Cola was a method of keeping the Blacks down and all kinds of stuff like that. I have all the literature if you ever… I don't know where it is, but…

INTERVIEWER: Did any of the faculty ever support the student radicals?

00:47:34

MAGDEN: Oh yeah. Yeah, you bet they did. Yeah, I don't know whether… I don't want to discuss names, but they did, and they paid for it, in some ways. I was proud of them.

INTERVIEWER: So were some of the faculty dismissed because of this incident?

MAGDEN: No, they quit.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any arrests made?

MAGDEN: Yes, quite a few.

[Interviewer asking Magden to answer a certain way]

00:48:20

MAGDEN: I was on that side with the, I certainly, thought the Blacks had just cause. They were being shoved outside, and from the day I started here, in the first row were the Blacks in my class. And I felt that it was a wonderful thing. That they were reaching for an education. And I had, there was a lot of redneck stuff here, as is everywhere that I've taught.

INTERVIEWER: And then in 1973, the faculty went on strike…

Ronald: Oh yeah…

INTERVIEWER: …why did that happen?

00:49:08

MAGDEN: His name was Richard Falk. He issued an order that there were to be nothing covering the windows of faculty offices. [Laughs] And this is another one you have to ask John about, and John said, "I am in charge of the faculty building, it's not the Dean of Students… what are you doing?" And I told him that it was an immediate order for everyone to cover their window. I mean they weren't going to take any crap off of Dick Falk and he kept, he kept this up. He had a vendetta against the faculty and, it got worse and worse. And we were in the Richard Nixon era, Tricky Dick and oh god, and all this flowed back and forth. And when I was president, I tried to defuse that, and Falk went and complained to Tom Ford and Tom came over to my home, pounding on the table, "You got to take it better, easy, you got to solve this problem with me on Dick Falk." And I said, I tried, I said, I cannot do it, I said, he just keeps meddling in the academic area, and I said, I'm just as opposed to him as the faculty is, I don't understand. And this time John got fired, and so it was all falling apart. And Falk was like manipulating, according to Larry Faulk, the Board to get Tom's job, all this was transpiring, and so I said, he's got to go.

INTERVIEWER: So how did the students fare during the strike? How long did it go on?

00:51:24

MAGDEN: Eight days. The strike went on eight days and, it was fought as long as it could go on and still get credit for the quarter. That was the magic number, everybody knew it. The… when Tom became entrenched… And I didn't go out with the faculty. I was at the time a division chairman and I had really mixed feelings about that. And, if I had to do it over again I would have gone out. Because I knew that the cause, the administrative cause was wrong. Knew it within me that they were destroying the relationship of students, faculty, administration… God, over personalities.

INTERVIEWER: Did the students support the faculty?

MAGDEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How about the community?

00:52:31

MAGDEN: Yes. The faculty, you can't strike in this town without the unions coming with you. This is still a very, very strong union town. And the college got caught in that vice. One thing I left out in the student… in the… Black… the riots. We went down 2000 FTE that quarter.

Interviewer: That's a lot.

MAGDEN: That was enough to cause nine people to get RIF [reduction in force] notices, that really shook everybody up.

INTERVIEWER: Okay and so, these two kind of dramatic events, how did that change the social and just kind of the atmosphere on campus?

00:53:30

MAGDEN: Oh, it destroyed Cloverleaf end of the quarter parties with faculty, staff, and students. That was a shame. And never, never was healed. Never… still haven't healed.

INTERVIEWER: But, how long did it take the trust to kind of be rebuilt after the faculty strike--

00:53:51

MAGDEN: Never was rebuilt. It never was rebuilt, it's gone. We grew too big and 30, 11… 30 faculty, 11 staff, 900 students it was easy, it was easy as pie. We could help all those students, we had wonderful relationships both in and out of school. There were lots of parties. Everybody was happy, we… it was a golden age, a good feeling age and then with the riots and the strike, it took the heart out of the college.

Interviewer: Okay. So--

MAGDEN: I might say the nurses tried to put it back together, and did the best job.

INTERVIEWER: So you also had a really heavy involvement in the McNeil Island education program. Was this something you struck out on your own or was it part of TCC?

00:54:48

MAGDEN: Oh no, I grew up beside a state prison. I grew up in Boise, Idaho, and the warden was [Raymond] May.[4] I came to Tacoma to teach, I got an invitation from [Raymond] May to come over and say hi. I had started interviewing prisoners at Boise. And way back, in the earlier years of college, famous murderers, that kind of thing. And so I went with Bob Thaden, Bud Schafer, I think Bob Lathrop. We went over to meet the prisoners and it was called Self-Improvement Group, SIG, and [Raymond] May – who I admired every bit as much as John Terrey – who was a reform warden who believed that education could change inmates. And he was wanting this kind of attitude, and he knew… He knew my background anyway, knew my mother. So, we went over, and the first thing the prisoners asked was could you help us? To get classes here, TV classes if it had to be. And so, and then the next day, John and I went to a martini party for Warren Magnuson, Senator Warren Magnuson, hale fellow, well met… He drank, he couldn't speak, he mumbled, he did everything you wouldn't believe a US senator. And John asked him, do you know where any money is that could start a program at McNeil Island? And… Senator Magnuson, he had his assistant, Featherstone Reid, famous for being called Feather. He turned to Feather and said, go find them some money. And Feather said, okay. And Monday, he called back and said we got $9,000 for you. And so we started a course in general Psychology 100 for the inmates. It went over incredibly well. We rode over on the boat, four or five times, I went to talk to them about other courses. We were hopeful that this grant would go on, it was an FCC grant to experiment on television courses. It was right at the beginning of the television era, and we sent Bob Lathrop as the teacher, to go over. And this is with high security, all kinds of crap. Anyway, about this time I met [Roland Vincent] on one of the ferry boats and told him we were really up against it – he was the treasurer of the Weyerhaeuser Company – and he said, well I'll see what I can do. And so the next time I went over it with him – he called and said let's go together – he said well we're going to go with $60,000 in a library supplement, to bring in library books that they can use. And so for eleven years,[5] the Weyerhaeuser people paid the tuition, there were some inmates who could pay it, but in the main it was a quiet, silent program. The head of the Weyerhaeuser Foundation was a woman and she said, "You're stealing my money," I said I'm not stealing your money [laughs]… Mr. Vincent said the Weyerhaeusers wanted to do this, I said, you go talk to them not me.

INTERVIEWER: So what year did the McNeil program start?

01:00:32

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[4] Magden refers to former McNeil warden Raymond May as Roland May throughout the interview, which has been corrected in brackets.

[5] This estimate may correlate to his statement that the full program length was 11 years. See also note 2.

MAGDEN: ’66.

INTERVIEWER: So really right after the colleges.

MAGDEN: Yeah, we were just in our birth panties, and what business did we have doing that? Well we were even worse, we were doing… I talked with a man named Greenhall at… Fort Lewis and he wanted a program, in criminal justice. And so, we started that, and the president of at that time Fort Steilacoom now Pierce, he called me and said, “What are you doing in my territory?” I said, federal land is open land, anybody that can put a program that they want, can do that, and he said, “I’m going to talk to the head of the community college system and we’re going to get you guys straightened out.” And I go, oh jeez he was mad [laughs]. So for I guess eight or ten years we had Fort Lewis and McChord and we were going along great.

INTERVIEWER: And how long did the McNeil program last, is that still going?

01:01:41

MAGDEN: No, till it went over to the state. When it went over to the state it automatically went to Pierce College. But it was no longer a college program.

INTERVIEWER: How many years was that, that we had it?

01:01:53

MAGDEN: Eleven.[6]

INTERVIEWER: How was it different to educate inmates from the population that was over here at TCC?

01:02:01

MAGDEN: Oh… that’s an interesting story. There was a race between the inmates and the guards on courses. Dead, boy, no quarter asked, if they get that course we get that course, it didn’t matter which side you’re talking to, and they were all mostly in psychology trying to outsmart each other [laughs]. It was great, great, great, wonderful program. I taught history there, all eleven years.[7] I volunteered to do that, I didn’t want a salary or anything, I wanted the program to succeed. There were a whole bunch of us that did that. Just whatever way we could, we’d put the money in the tuition thing… That was another very important part of the birth of the college

[6] See note 2 on the program length.
[7] See note 2.

library. We each took five extra students to get the library equipped and everything. That, we did that for three years. To get it started, the library. It was a real commitment.

INTERVIEWER: The library at McNeil or at Tacoma Community College?

01:03:11

MAGDEN: Both, here at the Tacoma Community College and at the main. On campus, we voted as a faculty to do that.

INTERVIEWER: And, at McNeil did the students attain a degree? Or were they just taking classes?

01:03:22

MAGDEN: Oh yeah! We had, we had some great and [laughs] uh… let's see, they were bank robbers, they were income tax evaders, these guys were great students. And you could never catch them cheating and they did a fine job at it, magnificent. Never, never, every time you caught up with one they were on another step. And so it was… I might say, that I got a job at the University of Buffalo and went to Attica to try to help after the riot, to try and help them with an education program and it got nowhere, nowhere. [Raymond] May and then Jake Parker, the next warden at McNeil, both were moderates. There were those who, wardens I've met, "make them pay." I remember one of them say, hang them up on the cross. Don't trust them, don't try to do anything with them. Just get them away, put them away, they're not going to change.

INTERVIEWER: But you actually volunteered for many years to work with them, so you must have not felt that way.

01:04:47

MAGDEN: I did. Yeah, I'm… if you're a teacher and you don't believe you can change students, what are you doing, what business are you in? [Laughs] You know? Jeez. I did, I taught on the… let's see… the McChord flightline, in the ready room. I taught in the barracks at Fort Lewis. I tried to *start* programs. We were, that was going clear back to the pool together with John, we were always trying… The idea was not to hold thirty students in a classroom, and self-contain. The idea was to go out, that community college concept was *community*, to go out in the community. I taught in the Hilltop for years, years trying. I taught at Purdy, hardest place in the world to teach, almost beating your head against the wall. All of that was, basically, the concept

of the community college, trying to help people have higher expectations and to reach for it. That was… I'm a product of that.

INTERVIEWER: So, when did you retire from teaching at TCC?

MAGDEN: 1983.

INTERVIEWER: And why did you decide to retire at that time?

01:06:13

MAGDEN: They were going to lay off 18 people. And I had, I don't know, 33, maybe 35 years in teaching. They offered a golden parachute. Lorraine, my wife and I, spent a year seeing if we could live off the retirement they paid and I retired on Friday and on Monday I was teaching on a submarine at Bangor. The guy came to see me on Friday and said boy we would like to have you come and work. And I said I'd love to, I've never taught on a submarine, it's time for me to try my luck. So I reported on Monday, I drove over and they gave me an admiral's hat with all kinds of gold braid, and I went down into the submarine, and they closed the hatch and waited to see what would happen with me. And nothing happened! [Laughs] I wasn't, whatever you call it, claustrophobic. And I taught there four years. Marvelous students, I enjoyed it.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you keep teaching after you left the college?

01:07:35

MAGDEN: I left the college two years ago. I taught until I was 84. And I will teach again. And I tutor the kids, as I said, in the neighborhood. I love it, it's why I'm still alive, I think, because I'm interested. I'm interested in the new math, or whatever. And I don't keep track of TCC anymore. I don't believe in tall buildings, I'm really opposed to them with everything in me. The college--

INTERVIEWER: Even with elevators?

01:08:17

MAGDEN: The college was built on a small scale so students wouldn't be over-awed. There would be no Suzzallo buildings. There would be no tall buildings to scare them. We would not meet them in faculty offices, we would meet them in the library or on the walk. There were ideas that were current, conducive to their coming to school. So I'm really not in tune with modern education.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think there's a way to apply that kind of ideology or that kind of spirit to the larger student population that we have today? Is there a way we could do that?

01:09:02

MAGDEN: Yeah. I think 900 students it's easy. 2,000 students, you're getting the optimum. And when you get up to 6,000 or 8,000 students, you've lost the personal touch and lost the contact. I fought with everything in me against the 72-seat lecture hall. I taught in the theater, 300 students, for four or five years, I lost a lot of those students and never got a chance to help, never. And I really objected to that. And I would have been-- to me now, density is bad, so I don't fit in that world. And I went through that. I had accounting, I took accounting with 300 other people, god, they would just cut out any—at the U and I did time at the big factory, it was worse on McNeil Island. In a converted, we started in converted cells, they tore out one wall. That was that, brutal, maybe what you want to call it. I mentioned the students we had but [laughs] that's another story.

INTERVIEWER: And then, but you have maintained very close ties with TCC since your retirement, and particularly the faculty are still very close, they get together on a regular basis—

01:10:35

MAGDEN: Yeah to sit and bitch. Yeah I go to those. We keep track of each other and our illnesses, and talk about the old times. I've forgotten how many of the original faculty are still alive. I was among the oldest, and I had the most teaching experience. And I was one of three from the outside that weren't from the school district. So, and I was very surprised when they elected me the president, I didn't really expect that, and didn't want it. I didn't want it, I knew Vern Bates, I knew Giaudrone, I knew the power struggle here. I didn't want to get involved in that at all, I had the desire to just teach and be with the students, you know, but it wasn't to be. And it was hard on my family, you know, all that.

INTERVIEWER: So in your opinion who've been some of the people who have been instrumental in keeping TCC moving forward and surviving through tough economic times over the past 50 years?

01:12:05

MAGDEN: …It's interesting. It's the students, that came here, that have had a positive experience. I'm in the community up to, I couldn't tell you how many clubs and

different things I go to. I'm with them, whether it's down on the waterfront, or the Japanese community, or business. I'm writing now the history of Selden furniture. He's very pro-community college. He thinks that, this is… it fits Tacoma, where everybody said it wouldn't. He's 82. All of that world of students, I don't know the faculty now or anything, but I do know the people who've attended this school and who felt that it was a great value to them and that's the essence anyway of what it was all about to begin with and continue. It's been, it has been a success story. I was here before it was here. I knew that this blank wall of hopelessness existed in Tacoma, it was… And the idea that there was a means of getting into the skilled labor pool, like nursing, it was tremendous. So I think it's been a success on the basis of student approval. I know that.

INTERVIEWER: And I think you've already said this but just in case, how many students have you taught over the years?

01:13:59

MAGDEN: One time, I was trying to think maybe it was Lita, I don't remember who, but they kept, it was one of the very first colleges to computerize. We had this punch system. And the records came out punched, and somebody counted up and I've had 16,000 students. And I don't know if other people taught more than that, probably did, but I made it a point to memorize their names, made it a point to know their families, I taught a tremendous number of people. And I've kept track with them. I can't go to the mall without meeting two or three of them.

INTERVIEWER: So how about your home division of social sciences? How has that changed since 1965?

01:14:56

MAGDEN: [Laughs] Oh god. Yeah, it's de-emphasized. In the beginning we were sort of an academic transfer program with an attempt to develop a technical arts program that Bates torpedoed again and again [laughs]. And so, and then it started going where it was supposed to go, which is into the technologies, the new technologies that were coming, and it got traction there, and grew into that. The students, it did follow the curve the students needed and wanted. And I felt good about that, I never, somebody… We had a junior college atmosphere of a lot of people who said, hey I can hardly wait till it becomes Tacoma University. And those people were by and large the elderly people. The young people coming through here and then going on elsewhere, never had that idea. They had the idea, hey these people want to learn, you

know, this isn't big U, this is a different world. And so, I think that I'd put it, as fulfilling student expectations.

INTERVIEWER: So we're pretty much out of time, I've just got one more question for you.

MAGDEN: I'm sorry.

INTERVIEWER: No it's okay. I've just got one more question for you. In your opinion where should TCC go in the future, how should we develop from here?

01:16:33

MAGDEN: Well, I'm the wrong person to ask that. I barely can- I work the computer, I write books, I don't know the… I know more about – since I'm writing a book on a furniture store family and that kind of thing – I know more about the future of furniture than I do about the future of higher education. But I do serve on visitor committees at the University of Washington. And I'm deeply involved in historical societies and all that kind of thing. And I can see their future. For example, the Elks Clubs, the Tacoma Clubs, all the old world of the 1950s and sixties are gone. All the lodge stuff, Moose, Elks, whatever, it's gone, past. Nobody saw it leave, but it left. That's one incident I want to make, it's clear out of context, but in 1967, Joe Kosai, a Japanese American, came to the faculty here and we celebrated, took him to the Elks Club to have lunch and they said he couldn't come in. And there were about eight of us who just put the Elks Club card on the table, registration table, and left. That was my first real glimpse of prejudice in Tacoma. And this college made every effort to work with diverse groups, every conceivable way we could think of. And Carl Brown led that wave, and it was… We may have had riots, we may have had trouble, but the idea was sound that reaching there was outreach or whatever you want to call it, it was a real part of us. And that's where McNeil Island came in, a lot of the people who taught at McNeil Island were diverse, minority people. [Lawanna] was particularly… well anyway. But as far as the future of the college, I would be unable to answer that. I know that the schools, the K12, are in real trouble with huge dropout rates resembling the 1930s. The people aren't going on and they feel hopeless, and that's a group of people at the college should work with, that's got to be worked with. The homeless, god, I work with homeless, the hospitality kitchen. And there's hundreds of them there, potential students that might be able to rise out of that. And you have to go to them, and I would hope the college mission is to help those, help the helpless. I would feel it strongly if I were going back into teaching it's not campus, the big tall buildings. But it's the community, it's what's in the name of the school, I'm never going to call it Tacoma University. But there is a faction in the community that wanted

it to be a university. I once – and this will be the last and then I'll shut up – was in a meeting with the president of the University of Washington, McCormick. And he was meeting with community college people and I was sitting next to, I can't remember, Tom Ford I guess. And this president, he was Italian-- well maybe it wasn't McCormick, it was somebody earlier. Anyway, he said, "now I'll be in touch" – the president of the University of Washington – "I'll be in touch with you community college people sometime in the future, when I have more time." And he went to sit down, I stood up and said thank you god. That was, [laughs] and the guy, the president of the college said, "don't embarrass us Ron! We, this guy can control some of our budgets." I said, I don't take that [laughs]. Anyway. It was sort of interesting. Later on, I got involved with the longshoremen. And they wanted an endowed chair of labor studies at the University of Washington. And I said well alright, I'll try to help you with that. So I ran a campaign, every man and woman in the industry gives $1,000 and they did, there were a thousand, over a thousand that gave a $1,000 each and [laughs] we went there and the guy said, the foundation lady said, "we can't take the money because the business donors would not contribute." And the president, it was Gerberding, came out, a day or so later, and he called, and says "we're going to take the million dollars. I want you to come up we'll tell the foundation lady." So I went up and we told her, and she quit.

INTERVIEWER: [Laughs] Okay.

MAGDEN: And that's my last story.

INTERVIEWER: Well thank you very much I do appreciate your time.