

TOM ANDERSON
Oral History Memoir
Interview by Kris Tucker
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Olympia Washington

Kris Tucker: *Tell us a little bit about what drew you to Olympia and why Evergreen?*

Tom Anderson: I was given a catalog by a girlfriend of mine in Vancouver, Washington. I was going to Clark College and I finished my degree at Clark. You know, to backup little bit, when I was 18, I left home to hitchhike through Europe for three months. And then at the time I was gone my draft number came up and it was very low, it was number 13 as matter of fact. So the only way that I could stay out of the draft when many of my friends were going and not coming back with very good consequences was just to get into school, so I went to Clark College and completed the two years, and applied for the University of Washington and couldn't get in because I didn't have enough foreign language credits. In the meantime, a girlfriend had given me the catalog for the college, which was based upon a place that didn't exist yet. So it was kind of an abstraction of what it could be. And one of the things that were in the prospectus for the college is that there was going to be a Blues Festival. And I thought that sold the deal for me. So at that time, Evergreen was taking pretty much anybody that would apply because it was so new, there was no real track record for people. So I applied and got in and came up in the fall of 1971 and started.

Kris: *What do you remember about your perceptions of Olympia and Evergreen at that time?*

Tom: Well, to put it bluntly redneck, kind of a backwater town. I mean, there really wasn't much culture. I had driven through it a couple of times. It was defined by the Capitol building and the Capitol. I didn't know, I had a friend in Vancouver, Washington who lived here, his dad worked for the highway department. So that was about my only relationship with it. But, you know, then, when we first came out here, there was, seems to me like there were only about four or 500 of us at the college and there were people living in buses in the parking lot. There wasn't any housing really finished yet. Some people were distributed among the west side and even the first couple of months of school the seminars were held in different buildings off campus. It was all in the state of construction and mud. And so that even at the college, there was this relationship between, you know, hippies and veterans and, and construction workers and it was just, it had a chaotic beauty to it, when you felt that anything was possible because there really wasn't any template. There wasn't any history to follow. So we were making up our own history as we went along. And I think that was what was so defining about it. Olympia in and of itself, for those of us that were in college, was pretty much defined by the west side. And there really wasn't much, you know, in the way of entertainment or culture downtown. So those of us at Evergreen kind of invented the culture that we were looking for.

Kris: *How did you invent that culture?*

Tom: Well, in the early, let's see, in the early 70s, I was involved in helping to co-found Olympia Film Society because we wanted a film group and a place where we could show films. I was involved in the group that started the Olympia Food Co Op. And that started out as just a few of

us that were buying food in bulk and distributing it to each other door to door and then we got a little a little building, a little old house on Fourth Street that we distributed out of. When we started Art Walk, that was about a half a dozen of us that opened up our studios in the Water Street building, where Mansion Glass was located, and people who were living in the Angeles apartments. And then the Olympia Film Society was having one of their festivals and so we coordinated having our studios open. So we, we kind of invented things out of a need, because they didn't exist. And then they became more cemented into the culture of Olympia over time. The Procession of the Species was started in our building. Bands started to develop, and the culture of music that was created. Across the street, on Fourth Avenue, from my studio above Childhood's End, that's where Sub Pop records started, and then they became an international phenomenon, and it was just two guys in an apartment above Barnes Floral. So there was there was a certain kind of dynamic and do it yourself ethic where people were creating what didn't exist in a part to entertain themselves or ourselves.

Kris: *Back when you were just starting at Evergreen, what was happening on campus in terms of cultural life?*

Tom:- Well, we would have films in the lecture hall, and people would get together to watch those. They had a guest speaker series - Ken Kesey, Allen Ginsberg, you know, people like that that were coming to visit and also being involved in some of the seminars. The first year I was there, I was in the Man and Art program. And that was basically a man by the name of Jose Arguelles, who wrote the book on mandala art, he and his wife, Miriam. So we studied Asian philosophy and the mandala. And that's how, how we ended up coming up with the concept to paint the stairwell mural in the library, because that was based upon the four elements. And we wanted to do a mural, but the college didn't want us to do anything that would put a bad light on the college itself. So they felt if they put us in a place that was the most remote and out of out of sight, that that was acceptable. And so they put us in a stairwell and we did that.

And then with the radio, that was a roommate of mine, and Karen's, and we were sitting around the table, and he decided that he wanted to start a radio station, even though he had no experience. And that's kind of what Evergreen was about. Back then it didn't matter if you'd had experience, the education was in the passion to learn something new. And so he rallied together and we put a list of names to send to the FCC, call letter names and, and KAOS was actually number five on the list of ten, and that's the one that the FCC gave us. And we put together a radio station that was 10 watts when we started, and it was built out of old surplus military hardware. And I think it reached about the west side on Division, that was as far as it went, which remarkably now, it's streamed globally. So we've come that far from just, you know, five miles away to around the planet.

Kris: *Were you a DJ?*

Tom: Yeah. Yeah, I did. I did the Inner Ear Tickle Conspiracy. And my wife Karen did Karen's Cosmic Kitchen. And so she did the very first cooking program on radio. And I did a show every Thursday night. And, and that was something that was just fun. Just you know, we were all interested in music and I would assemble these mixtapes anyway, so it was just a segue to be able to, to go into the library at Evergreen that had an extraordinary, it was an extraordinary

library. Mostly cassettes. And so, yeah, it was, it was it was a lot of fun. And it was a real community, real sense of community and adventure, and creating a radio station.

Kris: *Was that sense of community pervasive in the college?*

Tom: Yes. You know, I think it was because we were like, you know, like a lifeboat adrift in the ocean of culture. And so people banded together, to entertain themselves and educate each other and come up with new ideas. I mean, really, the sense of community was what made it work. And I think that those habits of having potlucks and seminars and groups where people could get together and feel comfortable and, and discussing ideas and working together and building projects — that extended into the Olympia community long after people graduated. Then, you know, that's what would segue into the some of those events that I told you about are a direct influence of those of us who had been to Evergreen and supported in coming up with new ideas. We had, like, we were in a record store with budget tapes and records on Fourth Street. And we were getting together thinking we should have a craft fair. And then somebody said, well, instead of just a craft fair, why don't we have tugboat races? And then someone said, God, that's a great idea. How do we do that? You know, so we didn't know how to do it. Then that became Harbor Days, which is now a fixture in the community. But it was just three people in a record store initially did that.

Even the farmers market was a friend of mine, Steve Wilcox, that started that. And it's like, if there's a need to be met, you just get people together. Nobody felt like they had to have a board of directors or they had to have a salary or things weren't organized. It was really more, you know, the spirit of chaos and putting things together that made it work, at least initially. Usually things get far more complicated the longer they exist. And then you need budgets, and then you need grants, and then you need people to oversee that and sometimes that either can benefit the program, or it can be its slow demise.

Kris: *When you moved to Olympia to go to college, did you think that you'd be staying for the rest of your life?*

Tom: Oh, gosh, no, no, I didn't think that. I had gotten married four days after I turned 21, Karen had just turned 20, and we never thought we were and that was in 1973. We never felt we were going to be here longer than three or four years. I don't know what happened. We continue to ask ourselves that. "How is it that we're still here?" But it you know, as a community it offered so much for our family when our kids were born.

You know, as an example, a metaphor of how we had this sense of community drive and need. When our kids were small, and they started to go to school, we decided to redefine the educational system in Olympia. And so we got together with three or four other families and hammered up an idea and a concept which became the Options Program. And now it's currently at Lincoln, and Jimmy and Amber's kids go to the Options Program, or did, I don't know if they still do. But we felt we needed a program where families could be directly involved in the education of their kids, which meant that they had to participate in it. So it was almost like a co-op. But we felt like, since we pay the taxes for our educational system, why can't we have a say in the way the taxes are done? Why make it separate from, that we had to do our own financing of our own schools. So we worked in lobbied with the school district for I think it was three years anyway, before they finally voted to approve a pilot project which was out on

Boulevard Road. And that's where it began. And but again, it was a way that community could come together and create what they felt was a need. What was your other question? Where does that start?

Kris: *Why did you stay?*

Tom: Oh, why did I stay in Olympia? Well, it kind of worked. And then by that time I was doing Mansion Glass and I felt a sense of, of support, family and friends and you know, obviously the geographic beauty can't be beat. It's close to everything. My family lived in Vancouver, Washington, which we could get to. It would have been nice to live closer to family when the kids were young and we needed more support for childcare. I don't know that we're going to continue to live here for the rest of our lives. But I felt, you know, all the years that we were here, it was easier to create the world that we wanted with friends rather than looking for it somewhere else. And I think that Olympia at that time, which was a unique period, was really an open book of possibilities. And so that's, that's a lot of what inspired so many of the changes and things. I used to feel like I was Andy of Mayberry, walking down the street where you could kind of wave at the chief of police and mayor. It's like you knew everybody. And eventually, a lot of those people ended up becoming Evergreen graduates, so they morphed into the community as a whole. So you felt like you could have a reasonable expectation to be involved in things that would be of benefit on a much higher level to the whole rather than a few. That's, I think it was almost comfortable. And the rural nature of it, too. I mean, we since we live out at Summit Lake, you know. When we bought our land, I had this naive thought that I was going to build my own house. And that's all I wanted to do. And so I bought land and I cleared a place with an axe and a chainsaw. And I put in my own road and dug all the ditches and Karen and I lived in a 12-foot travel trailer for six months while she was pregnant. And it was probably the happiest time we ever had because we didn't have any debt. And we did end up building the house and I didn't end up spending 15 or 18 years building a house that we're still in. So, you know, we made it happen, but it was just out of a sense of creative passion, I guess, that we did that. So we're still here.

Kris: *Do you think Olympia has a unique kind of creative identity still?*

Tom: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I do. You know, it, it ebbs and flows. You can look at each decade and see the 70s 80s and 90s. The 2000s. And, you know, I think in the 90s, there was real, it was a real hotbed for music and theater and literature and, and it was... I kind of miss that now. I don't feel that that's the same as it was. It's I don't know that there's that same kind of improvisation by people getting together and making things happen now, with younger people, as there was back in the 70s. I mean, those of us in the 70s were coming out of the 60s, which was an entire decade of, you know, freedom of thought and experimentation on a lot of different levels. And, and it was just, there was a certain trajectory that was happening, that we just were riding that train into it. And now it seems that people are far more careful. And I think that they're much more removed. And I would have to think a large part of it has to do with the computer and phones and things that people detach themselves from taking advantage of having a one on one conversations and meetings with people. And, you know, putting together bands and doing that just out of the sheer joy of it. Boy, back then it seemed like the ideas were so big there weren't rooms big enough to hold them. And they were just bursting everywhere. People just opened up a storefront, you know, or open up a gallery just to, you know, have a pop up gallery

that would last maybe six months, with no intention of it ever been longer than that. And it was so there was a just an energy that I know now, everybody seems to be far more careful in their, you know, the way they move forward.

Kris: *You came at such a unique time for Evergreen. Do you think that kind of creative impulse was alive in Olympia five years before? I get the sense it was a unique moment in time.*

Tom: It was. There was a man by the name of Bob Gillis. And he was an artist here in town and he was also a teacher at North Thurston I think it was. And he, I don't know if he got fired or quit his job because he was a little too forward thinking. This was in the mid 60s, early mid 60s. But he and a woman named Pat Holm, who is still alive, they started a coffee house called I think it was called Nonesuch, and it was on the west side where the Olympia Framemaker is, and so that became kind of a hub for people who were traveling between Portland and Seattle folk musicians. And there were a lot of poets and things and so there, there was that culture that existed but it was much, much smaller. And I think much more suspect, you know, by the community as all Evergreen was pretty suspect by the community as a whole. I don't think there was a real embrace of its existence because people thought they were going to be invaded by hippies, and you know, a counterculture thing that was gonna move in a direction out of their conservative nature, that wasn't, it wasn't acceptable. It you know, I don't think that existed. I think most of the benefits were positive for the community. But we, we, we did this thing called Rite of Spring, the first year in the Man and Art program. We decided to celebrate spring and I did the poster for it. And we created this event inside the library lobby. We completely covered the floors in aluminum foil, and we put up parachutes. And we created a mock spaceship ride and invited the community to come out. And I can't imagine what people must have thought when they walked in and saw, you know, this lightshow going on and there's music and people dancing and this tie dyed things that we had done and it was it was really bizarre. But that that became the precursor to the festival in the spring. Super Saturday, when we did that.

You know, when I finished my first year at Evergreen the second year, and in that first year, I got a job, I needed to have a job. So I looked on the bulletin board and there was a small postcard that said there was a job opening as a graphic design assistant. So I applied with a woman named Connie Hubbard, who was the resident graphic designer. And no one had ever taught me about a portfolio when I was in my first two years, so I didn't know what that was. And she says, "Well, do you have any of your work? Can I see your work?" And I said, "Well, it's all in the back of my, my panel truck." I had a 47 Chevy panel truck. And she said, "Well, let's go look at it." And I opened the doors and all of these paintings and drawings fell out onto the ground out of this old panel truck. And she looked at it and she said, "You're hired." And she gave me, you know, my first break, really, of, of teaching me graphic design and how to how to work with people to develop what their needs were when the different programs. We designed all the college catalogs. We did the original logo of the tree that was done in the pen and ink form. We did that on a napkin at a Mexican restaurant on the west side one night. And so we worked together and created you know, we just had this carte blanche ability to create whatever we wanted and we had wonderful people that were working with us. Tim Girvin. Are you familiar with Tim? Tim Girvin Design Studios. He's got studios around the world. And he's done, he was fresh out of high school in Spokane. And he came and started working with us as

a calligrapher. And his passion was calligraphy. And Lloyd Reynolds from Reed College would come and he would teach us little little classes of five or six of us that calligraphy. So Tim's gone on to design movie, posters for three or four or 500 movies, you know, everything from Star Trek to Apocalypse Now to Mean Streets to, you know, Cadillac. I mean, he's probably the best-known calligrapher in the world at this point. And so he was part of that crew.

And so we worked together. And the second year I decided I'd always had a passion for cartoons and animated films. And so I always wanted to make my films, my drawings, move. And so I decided to get a, to do an individual individual contract with a faculty by the name of Bob Bernard. And he said we have this Richmarc animation stand in a box. And that was the 16 mm animation machine that - University of Washington had one and Boeing had one. That was only the third one in the state. He said, "If you want to put it together, you can, you know, see what you can do with it." So I put it together, and he put me in a dark room in the basement of the library. And I started making films and hand drawing all the cells, you know, I would do like 16 drawings for a quarter-second kind of things like that, very laborious. And then I started going to the Washington State Library and getting old movies and I'd bleach them in my bathtub and then I'd draw on the acetate and make movies that way. And so I did the, there was a recording studio, so I'd bring in friends, and we'd record the music and sync it up to the films. And I think I did about three or four films, not long ones, maybe two or three minutes long. But that was a long time.

And after a year, I just burnt out on being by myself in a dark room. I wasn't adaptable to that. And there wasn't much support. The Canadian film organizations were the only ones that were doing experimental animated films at the time. But ironically, while I was working in graphics, one day, I get a letter from this company. They wanted to know if I would be interested in coming down and interview for a job in San Francisco in film animation. And I was, I had lost my interest in doing it and I declined. Well, in hindsight, it turned out it was George Lucas, and it was the beginning of the whole Star Wars. They were casting a very wide net looking for anybody who was who was involved in, in, in the college level, and there weren't very many. So it was one of, you know, one of the opportunities I blew off.

Kris: *Do you regret that?*

Tom: Oh, you know, there had been times where I regret that because now I see the importance of what animation is, and to have been on the forefront of that. You know, I, it would have been an entirely different career trajectory. You know, I don't have a lot of time to regret doing things that I didn't do, you know, and I would rather, you know, celebrate the things that I did do and good things that came out of that. But, but certainly, I had a lot of ideas, and I think what I do regret most about that is that I didn't continue to evolve my understanding of what computers were because at that time we didn't have computers and there was a keyboard but I would have to program out all of my movements on the camera and they were spit out into all of these numbers and letters and reams of paper and and so you didn't have the benefit. So if I kept with it I think I could have been more on the cutting edge of how I would have explored computer graphics more. But I didn't. I stayed pretty much old school. I always did all my design work with a pencil and did all my working with a razor blade and rapidograph pen.

Kris: How did you get from there to Mansion Glass? What's the story?

Tom: I was living on East Bay drive in an old Victorian house. And there was a group of people living in the mansion across the street. And, which is still there too, it's a B&B. You know, but it was kind of a collective at the time. And I tried to rent it, but the owner wouldn't rent it to me because my hair was too long. So he rented it to the one of my friends who have shorter hair. So that's how that worked out. In the meantime, Karen, I got this place across the street on the water. So I was hitchhiking one day, and this guy picks me up. And his name is Bill Hillman. And he, we got to talking and just in that short trip from there where San Francisco street meets East Bay into town. He said he was thinking about starting a glass studio. And did I want to be a partner, just like Chris like that. I said, Yeah, sure, why not? So we started doing stained glass together in the basement of my house on East Bay. And we, we had, we borrowed, we had another one of the other friends that were with us, actually Dean Katz – he's the one that started the radio station – he became one of our partners as well. And we borrowed a couple hundred bucks from his dad in Seattle, who is a psychiatrist, and to buy glass, and then we we created this studio in the basement, this drafty old basement. And there's kind of a funny story to that. Dean made his first window. And when we looked at it, we said it's like what these colors what it's what were you thinking, and they were so bizarre and in a incongruent sort of way. And it turned out, he was colorblind. And we said, this probably isn't the best career for you to go. I don't think that's going to work. And so he got involved in journalism, you know, black and white, just journalism. And so he was doing journalism while he was the was the station manager at KAOS. And then, then he moved away from that after he graduated and continued with journalism and then became a journalist for the Seattle Times. And then he worked with Warren Magnuson in Washington, DC and he got very involved in in the politics well Now long story short, he's been Bill Gates' speech writer for the last 12 years. So it was a good thing that we told him stained glass wasn't a good idea. He's done okay, yeah.

But it's funny how these twists and turns. To go back to Bill picking me up hitchhiking, and then we started the glass studio together. And then another one of his school friends, they all went to Lakeside together when they were in the 60s, early 60s. And so we said, we were kind of growing out of this space in my basement. And we thought, well, let's get, let's see if we can find another place to move into. And so we talked to thie guy named Ray LaForge, and he had a bike shop downtown. And he said, "I bet you can rent this space upstairs here for about 20 bucks a month for the entire upper floor." It had been condemned for like nine years. The ceilings were caving in lath and plaster was falling off and we went up and looked at and said, "This is perfect." So we made a deal with the landlord and we decided that that's where we were going to open Mansion Glass. And so we tore down some old barns and we threw up a bunch of barnwood on the on the walls, made it look kinda kind of you know - boho bro-ho [laughs], you know the look, macramé, barnwood and, and so we started making windows and trying to sell our work. We got some lucky breaks from a couple of contractors in town who liked to use stained glass as a feature in all their new construction. So we taught ourselves and a lot of how we taught ourselves was we came into a collection of, I guess you would call them, image banks. There was a man by the name of Ray Nice and who had committed suicide in the 40s. But he had donated his entire stained glass studio to St. Martin's college, and it was in an old barn. And so we made friends with an antique dealer or something and I can't remember

exactly how it came but we got all of his original sketches. Just loads of them. I mean, we must have had four or five trucks full of original watercolor drawings for stained glass projects all up and down the West Coast, mostly Seattle, like all the windows in the University of Washington library, the little building up here, that's the old museum. And we studied those, we just pored over them and that's how we learned how to design for stained glass.

And we also had picked up some old windows in there that we, we restored and there was glass in there too. We got to be good friends with some of the monks out at St. Martin's and so they would take us through there and we would look at them and then you know, we maybe buy, you know, some old sheet glass for a couple bucks a square foot or something, you know, not much, not much more than what we were paying for it in Seattle at the time. But it turned out that at some point about 10 years later, there was a glass dealer in Portland that came up and looked at it and bought all of it for hardly anything. And it turned out to be the second largest fine original Tiffany sheet glass in the world. And so the value of it went from like \$2 a square foot to like \$2,000 a square foot because if you can use the original glass to do the restorations and renovations, projects, lamps and all that it's a, it's a huge deal for archival work. So that, we kind of just fell into that and so we had all these drawings and we used to have them up on the wall and and they just were part of our atmosphere, but we realized that they needed be cared for better than we could. So we donated them all to the University of Washington architecture school. And they have them and and we didn't know enough to get, you know, like a tax write-off or something, something useful from that we just the way we operated, just give them to him.

Kris: *Are you still working with glass?*

Tom: Occasionally, you know if I have a friend that's interested in something or I, I did, my son was living in Malibu, California on a ranch and he was building some yurts down there. So I did some windows for it. You know, when you, when you cut glass for like 18 years, you just don't forget it. You know, it just comes right back. But I'm not as inspired, you know, to work in it. But that said, if if there was an interesting public art project, or if I was approached by somebody that wanted to do something in glass, I would certainly look at it again. It's a very physical job you're standing a lot, you know, and it's in working with the lead has its, you know, compromises as well, which I, I did have lead poisoning for a little bit. So it was one of my reasons for getting out of it. But I still have an interest in it and a love for it.

Kris: *After glass you went to painting?*

Tom: I was doing glass and I had an eye doctor come in, and I did a commission for him doing these etched windows. And he said, "Do you do graphics?" And I said, "Well, yeah, I do. I draw, I can do things." And he said, "Would you be interested in doing the logo for me?" And I said, "Sure." And he said, "I'm just not happy with all the professional outfits that I've hired to do this. And so I just want to see what you can come up with." And so I ended up designing all the marketing material for Pacific Cataract and Laser Institute, including their script "p" that they still see old guys at Costco here with the hats and I think, "I did that," you know. [Laughs] But they still use it and that actually did for them as a t-shirt designed for a bunch of staff, they were doing a marathon. So you never know, you know how things work that way. But so I started doing graphics, more and more graphics and for a lot of medical things. And then I, I

ended up illustrating for the same group of people, some of the doctors, I illustrated a book on eye surgery. And so I had no background in medical illustration, but they asked me. You know, most people don't know where to go when they have things like that. Now, you could just go online and find, but back then you couldn't and so that I said, "Well, yeah, I'll give it a try." And so they gave me all these slides of eye procedures and diseases and all kinds of stuff. And I looked at these slides, and I go, "Oh, my God, I don't know if I can draw this." And so, but I did, I took a rapidograph pen and some tissue paper and a toothbrush. And I used the toothbrush and the India ink as a form of an airbrush. And that and then the rapidograph and I drew 130 illustrations, plates for a book on eye surgery that became an award winning book for the doctors, but doing graphics then kind of helped to support me. I knew at that point that I wanted to move out of doing stained glass, but I needed to make an income so the graphics helped me to make the income to support my family.

But about the same time — I think it was 1989 — I was doing all the graphics for Marianne Partlow gallery for all of her shows every every month and one day she called me up and she said, "I have a client who needs a work of art to go over a heat vent above the fireplace and nothing works. Do you have any ideas?" And that's about the time I was at Pilchuck, and I was working with copper, infusing copper in glass, because it had the same coefficient expansion meaning you could put it in molten glass and as the glass cooled, the copper could stay in as an inclusion in glass without breaking it. So I was messing around with copper, and so I said, "Yeah, I know I could probably do some kind of a painting out of copper." And so I went up to Boeing Surplus and I bought a bunch of copper. And I did this piece for her and it went over, so it wouldn't be affected by the heat. It would just expand and contract. And that was the first time I'd ever done a mixed media piece, on copper. And that started, just got the wheels going on all the ways that I could work with patinas and chemicals and so I started reading on formulas, and it became this kind of like, oh, alchemical process of learning things. And I knew that the time I was making these paintings with copper and I was using nitric acid and big brushes on copper and the different patinas and the oxides, and no one was doing anything like that in the galleries and so it kind of gave me an edge up and I was able to combine my love of craft coming from the glass work and you know, working with hand tools and hammers and there was something you know, very kind of primitively satisfying about hammering nails and copper. So that's that's kind of where that ended up.

But then over the course of time, like copper, there was a shortage of copper. And so I just, I came up with the idea of using recycled offset printing plates that I was getting from the printer, who was printing my graphics work. And then I would get copper leaf and goldleaf and apply it onto the aluminum to kind of create an image of copper but then and then that took me in a whole different direction in terms of the aesthetics of what the leaf was and the applications and painting over it and I just enjoyed working with whatever I had available. I didn't like to be kind of hamstrung by feeling that I couldn't be spontaneous because I needed a certain item or a certain paint or something. So I started using a lot of just recycled house paints and pastels and, you know, just kind of made it up as I went along.

Kris: *I've seen your work on globes, on guitars, on panels of various types.*

Tom: Yeah, yeah, I kind of have a dream of, of doing kitchen appliances. Yeah, refrigerators and

you know, stoves. When I was in my first second year college, I did. I painted on cars, and so I did a lot of Volkswagen buses and stuff like that. So it wasn't outside my norm. My dad was a jazz musician. And so I was influenced heavily growing up, living in a household where many of his friends were abstract painters and poets and they would hang out at the house and we would go over to rehearsals at their house. And that's the only thing I ever did with my dad pretty much was go to rehearsals with him. And so I was exposed to a lot of artwork and music and you know, all the things that came all the trappings that came with that kind of a beatnik era that I grew up in. But there was one painting he had in the den that was - what did they call that? - it was an assemblage, that's what they like to call it. And it was about two by five feet and it was all of these smashed paint cans and in an old Model T fenders all this crap was on there. Paint thrown on it, it was just like I just couldn't I just couldn't wrap my head around what or what it was. And I realized in hindsight my dad was trying to expose me to all these new things. And he would do the same thing with music. He'd put in this Ornette Coleman that I just — some of this so far out music — dissident, you know, that I just didn't get. But he thought it was important that I get it all you know, and then make a choice of where I wanted to go. So there were paintings that their friends would give them and you know, they would be. There was one, it was a Milton Wilson painting, and it was hung on the wall in our living room. And I swear to God that oil paint didn't dry for three years. I used to stick my finger at it, you know, just because it just felt good.

[49:56]

Kris: *Probably didn't help the painting.*

Tom: No, but I put left my mark on it. I sold it to Pulliam Deffenbaugh gallery in Portland. Actually I put it on consignment with him because I needed the money. And I kind of regret selling it now. There are times where you have to do things, you know. And so, yeah, cuz it was it was it was really nice painting. It was probably 30 inches by 65 something like that. Big, you know museum quality for Milton. He didn't he didn't do a lot of them. But he is you know he's he's a kind of a legendary abstract painter in Portland. As my dad was a legendary musician in Portland as well. There's a really good — if you want to get a feel for that time period. There is a TV show that was recorded with Louie Bunce, he was probably the number one abstract painter in Portland during the 50s and the 60s. He hosted a live TV show on — it was in kinescope. kinescope was before they had the kind of tape that they have for TV now. So it's kind of like the old, oh gosh, you know, the old Steve Allen and things like that in the 50s. It's got a certain look to it in black and white. It's called "Jazz Art 61." It was done in 1961. So it's, it's this group of musicians including my dad, he wrote all the charts and Louie is painting while they're all playing, and there's all these wild abstract movies that were done or kind of overlapped and there, and it's like a happening event, they used do that kind of thing.

So, so I think that's all, you know, in terms of considering influences. I think that might have been one of your questions. Yeah, I got to thinking about that. And I'm maybe one of my earliest influences was one of my parents' friends. His name was Richard Knight. And he was a baritone bass player, real accomplished jazz musician, but a real — he was really eccentric. And so we used to go to his house and his house — he painted all the walls and the ceilings as if it was an abstract painting, but different time periods. And he would have friends come over and

they'd set up, they'd play jazz there and he give people paint brushes and everybody would do the individual tiles in, in the bathrooms in this old house built like 1920 Craftsman kind of style. And I used to just sit and wonder at these murals painted all over the house and the walls and it was just it was it was really unlike anything I'd ever been exposed to, and on a regular basis so I could always go back. And that was a big influence. He did a painting that I have in my studio now that I had in my room, my bedroom since I was like seven years old. It's a very it's a very surreal picture of kind of a lion. But it's so abstract, I'm not sure you'd even know that. But he he had a difficult time socializing. So he became school janitor, so he would only work the midnight shift. So he could he could go in and he could look at what the kids were doing and their artwork. But he didn't have to interact with people and so he never had a show.

Back then, in the 50s, they really didn't have art galleries. People exhibited their work in furniture stores. And I think he tried to do that once but he got so upset he was only there for a day. But he was a big influence. And of course, you know, people like Robert Motherwell who was incidentally born in Aberdeen, I find that fascinating thing. And, and, of course DeKooning and Franz Kline. I always had an attachment to kind of the expressive nature of abstract expressionism. It, it was like, it was like looking at the way jazz sounded, and since I'd grown up with jazz, it was like there was a connection there. And I also was heavily influenced by the psychedelic art posters of the 60s.

Kris: *You have a collection of those.*

Tom: Yeah, I have probably, at least 200 and I, my collection began when I used to go to shows in Portland when I was 15, and 16. But my parents were friends with a woman who was the original singer of the Jefferson Airplane. And so they stayed at our house after they left Airplane because she got pregnant, and when they came and stayed with us for a while, they gave me this whole stack of posters that they brought from the Fillmore along with a whole stack over records of music I hadn't heard before it up to that point, that that really changed. You know, there's an old Daoist quote, "When the lesson is to be learned the teacher will appear." And so there's so many times in my life I can look back and go, this kind of accidental acquaintance ended up pushing me into a different path that I would probably never selected on my own. Or, you know, maybe not at the time I did. So I'm really thankful for all those sometimes awkward events.

Kris: *One of the things I've always appreciated about your work is that you have abstract, the colors, but you also have strong imagery, symbolic imagery — the bird, the lotus. Was that a merging of two trends in your mind?*

Tom: When I, if you look at kind of the trajectory of my work, like when I was doing posters when I was 16 or 15, you know, it was really kind of built around imagery. Aubrey Beardsley, or you know, Mukha or any of that kind of nouveau art of the time. Illustrations. You know, I was influenced by that and worked in that realm. And then, but when I was really young, what I wanted to be was an architect, and I kept scrapbooks of architecture. So there was always I think, this kind of sense of kind of order and you know, like Frank Lloyd Wright was just hit on all levels because he looked at everything as a possibility, whether it was the furniture the building or the lamps or let it windows or it was just all encompassing. So, you know, I guess my influences in studying philosophy and Asian art and you know Sumi painting and the different

calligraphy and it all, it all kind of shows up in one way or the other, you know, in the work that I do. I do like a certain sense of balance. But I like a certain amount of chaos too that keeps it interesting. I try not to, you know, second guess too much that there has to be a narrative specific to what I do, and I give myself a lot of leverage to be spontaneous. And, you know, I, I have this quote that, something, something that I wrote, something that I was thinking. Less is more. Magic is in the details and surprise can be a solution." So that's kind of the way I feel about you know, making art, or really doing anything, is to be open, you know, be open to the result in and not even to be too quick to accept or not accept the result. And so that's why I'm often working on multiple pieces at the same time, so I can kind of give it a rest and you know, come back later. And I find now if I go through my portfolio of the work I do, I'll go back like, Oh, God, I don't even remember doing that. Like, where did that come from? I get totally kind of surprised at. I don't identify with it the same way. And then there are things that I do that I think, you know, are the greatest thing I've ever done and nobody gets it at all. You know? It's just like, well, heck, what do I know? You know, just kind of keep it in motion. You know, it's just a process. It's just life. Process of life. Adaptability, change, you know, finding the humor in it.

Kris: Anything else you want to say?

Tom: Well, I hope I can still be mesmerized by the whole thing. I find as, I'm 68 now and be 69 September, I'm going to be married 48 years, you know, in September. You know, those are kind of my family and my, my relationship is kind of my feel my greatest accomplishment. And I don't, I feel that I wouldn't even be doing the same thing I'm doing now if I hadn't had the support of my family and Karen and the kids. And you know, support from your friends, your family, your community is so important, I think to help you at those moments where you're really feel a lot of self-doubt that you made the right decision or not.

I guess I've been driven by a great deal of faith. That said, your quote, trust in God, but tie up your camel, you know. I'm not ready to leap off the abyss hoping there's that soft landing. I keep trying to think ahead.

I just, I think I'll just keep creating. People say how are you going to retire and I'm going, it's really not part of my lexicon of retirement when you're an artist you, you just hope that you keep creating until you drop, you know. That's the that's the final solution. But I don't, no I don't see myself - slowing down maybe, you know. I'd like to look at long horizons for a lot longer in the future.

Kris: What are you working on now?

Tom: Long horizons. [Laughs.] Actually there are paintings that I've been doing that have been kind of of horizons. Yeah. So I've found this ink that I've been working with, that's from England. Very saturated pigment in it. It reminds me of the depth of color that I loved about stained glass, but on the surface. You know, the last year I've been working more on canvas, which I never did. Part of that is because the heavy boards that I used to use and the metals and things are just just feel too heavy for me now just to manually lift around. So I'm trying to work with materials that are more user friendly for my, my physical limitations as they were. But yeah, painting that, you know, that's probably one of the more recent things that I've done because it was just a couple months ago.

And I don't know, I think, I think I'd like to make more room in my studio to do more work. So if I can, if I can do this retrospective, maybe that will be a fun thing to do.

Kris: *Is your studio at home now?*

Tom: No, it's still downtown. I've always enjoyed the difference between being at home when I'm at home, I'm there, I've got my projects there, I've got, you know, just different. I like I like to have two separate realities. And so when I come to work in the studio, then that's my, you know, that's why I'm there. And yet I can leave that there and not bring it home and do work there too. Part of it is the materials I use. I kind of like to keep it isolated and not live in it. But I think that there's an importance for me to be intentional about the space that I'm in. So that's, that's why I'm still there. That could change too.

[1:05:40]

So yeah, well, I will be the one thing I'm working on is going back and forth to Nashville to work on my daughter and so-in-law's house. So I've been helping them renovate a 1956 house brick house.

Kris: *So they are going to stay in Nashville?*

Tom: I hope not. [Laughs] I hope they are going to move back to the west coast. But for now, that's where the music industry is. And, you know, for, for the present, that's the best place for them to be. And so it's fun to go back and, and engage and work, work together. That's something that I always felt was a benefit with my son and daughter is when we had projects we could work on together brought us much closer together to be able to do problem solving. And even if it was just splitting firewood, there was just something just very human about it. And so I still like to do that as much as I can. Even just painting. So, that's what I'm doing.