Voices of SJC: Oral History

Spring 2017

St. Joseph’s College

Transcribed by McEntegart Hall Library/Archives
Preface

On April 10, 11, & 12, 2017, in conjunction with the College’s Centennial celebration and supported by McEntegart Hall Library/Archives, 11 honors students participated in gathering four oral histories from S. Margaret Buckley (’55), S. Mary Florence Burns (’46), S. Pat Dittmer (’72), and S. Elizabeth Hill (’64). Led by librarians Mayumi Miyaoka and Lauren Kehoe, the students engaged with the College’s Archives to develop a strong understanding of the history of the College and the Sisters of St. Joseph’s. The students also developed strong research skills using primary sources in the archive. Students discussed the theoretical implications of capturing histories orally, in addition to gaining interviewing skills. The group worked collaboratively throughout the honors concentration to understand the history of the College and Sisters and then cooperatively developed a set of questions to ask each interviewee.
Informed Consent/Release Form

This oral history project is being conducted as a part of St. Joseph's College Brooklyn Campus Academic Honors Concentration Spring, 2017. Its purpose is:

- To introduce students to the concept of oral history, the construction of social history, and the process of creating oral histories
- To collect and preserve testimonies pertaining to the history of St. Joseph’s College through the experiences of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the SJC faculty and staff members, and develop a St. Joseph’s College Oral History Collection
- To showcase the SJC Oral History Collection on an online platform as a part of the centennial celebration.

Recordings and transcripts resulting from interviews conducted for the project will be deposited in the oral history collection of the McEntegart Hall Archives, where they will be made available for historical research and public dissemination. Participation in the project is entirely voluntary.

I, the undersigned, have read the purposes of the project and the use of the recordings, and I have agreed to be interviewed/to interview.

I have read the above and voluntarily donate to the project full use of the information contained in the recordings (including video and audio recordings) made on (date) at the Convent at 232 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn NY (location), transcripts of the recordings, and other materials collected during the interview.

I hereby assign legal title and all literary property rights, including copyright, in these recordings and transcripts to the project, which may copyright and publish said materials. The information may be used for scholarly or educational purposes as determined by the project.

Interviewee/Interviewer's signature

Date 4/12/17

Interviewee/Interviewer's name (please print clearly)
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Interviewee/Interviewer’s signature

Date 4/12/17

Interviewee/Interviewer’s name (please print clearly) Lubna Batal
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Interviewee/Interviewer's signature Cayla Caravella

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Interviewee/Interviewer’s signature

Date 04/12/17

Interviewee/Interviewer’s name (please print clearly)
Yesseny Fernandez: This recording was made as part of the oral history project by the St. Joseph’s College [Honors] Program in the Spring 2017 semester. It was recorded on April 12, 2017 at 10:00 am in the Sisters of Joseph’s Convent located at 232 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn New York. The interviewers’ names are Yesseny Fernandez, Cayla Caravella, and Lubna Batool. The interviewee is Sister Elizabeth Hill.

Let’s start with one of the first questions. Would you describe the most important moment, personally, during your time at St. Joseph’s College or the most important change brought to St. Joseph’s College?

Sister Elizabeth Hill: Those are two different questions so I’m going to take the first one because that’s the one I thought about. For me personally, I really have to be honest and say the most important moment was when I was inaugurated as the President. It was a very exciting day for me and I think it was an exciting day for the College. We had the event up at the Brooklyn Museum and we had 450 guests. It was kind of a splendid time with guests from other colleges and the Bishop was there. It was sort of a wonderful day to celebrate the history of the College and my own relationship to the College.

My mother was a graduate of St. Joseph’s College, she was in the second class. I’m a graduate of St. Joseph’s College so I have deep roots here. So to become the president was very meaningful to me and very special. That particular day stands out in my mind as one of those golden days that you look back and remember with great happiness.
As far as the changes are concerned, I think the biggest change that I would look at would be technology. It has just obviously taken over the world and St. Joseph’s is no different. I remember going back many many years ago, probably close to 30 years ago when we began to take tentative steps toward figuring out what we could do and what we should do. Obviously once you get into that momentum it builds and it builds and then you realize you have no choice you can’t go back. I’ve always admired the staff for their resilience actually because I remember distinctly we went to several other colleges and we talked to people and we got advice and we came back and we made a decision. We got this company CMDS and they came, they kind of like brought in boxes, plucked a computer on people's desks and they said [hand dusting gesture], “Good luck!”

And we just expected people to continue to do their work. The registrar to continue to get the courses scheduled and to get the exams scheduled and transcripts out. The financial people to send out the bills and pay the bills… And at the same time we’re saying they have to learn this other thing; “Hurry up and do it.” To my amazement they did it with such grace and genuine dedication to the mission of the College. That was also a very meaningful time but also one that just changed the College.

I don’t think we’ve ever really given up our commitment to the Liberal Arts and I hope we never do. But I think having integrated technology into virtually every aspect of the College enables us to be competitive, enables us to attract students, enables us to really prepare students to enter into the world of work. Whatever field you’re going into, whether it’s business or education or nursing or even the fine arts, you need to have technology at your fingertips and to know. So
those are the things that I think big big things that changed the college and yet didn’t change it which is good.

_Cayla Caravella:_ One question. Going back to what you said is the most important moment about your being President, what was that like? Being president of the whole College, what [were] some of the greatest parts or hardest parts for you?

_Sister Elizabeth Hill:_ On the whole, it was a lot of fun and it was fun because I was working with wonderful people. If you’re focused on a common mission, which we were, which was to bring the very best highest quality academic experience to our students. With the other elements in terms of extracurricular co-curricular experiences that we possibly could afford and if you’re all about that and you’re all coming at it from your different areas of expertise so, you have your financial people thinking about it you have development people thinking about it, everyone’s thinking about it. And then you come together, put the ideas on the table, everybody jostles about, and then you come up with a good idea; a better one than anyone had. It’s very energizing, it’s very exciting and it really enables you to move things forward and to make changes happen.

My predecessor, _Sister George Aquin_, had made huge changes at the college. I didn’t have to make as many huge changes as she did. As I said in my day the technology was the huge thing. But when she really decided to go out to Patchogue, when she decided to go co-ed, which was a big thing. Frankly, a number of the alumni were not happy about it back 1970. They were like, “St. Joseph’s College for Women is my school. I don’t want those guys to be there.” But they
came and in many ways she really changed the school so much for the better: [she] gave it strength financially, gave it strength academically. So I think that what we did was really to build on that. We introduced a number of new programs, we strengthened the graduate programs. I think our reputation grew and grew, we were recognized by US News and World Report and then by Forbes year after year as being one of the best colleges in our category. We’re not in the Harvard category, obviously but within our competitors and our colleagues. I always thought that was really an important thing because it showed the faculty that their work was valuable and valued. And it showed parents that their children, you people, would really be getting the very best education possible and experience that a college could hope to give. And so I think those are the things I look back on….

One of the things that was very near and dear to me because I love the arts, I love the opera, I love the ballet, I love the philharmonic, I love all of those things. I felt it very important that our students know about them. A lot of people hate the ballet, well at least know enough about it that you can know why you hate it. And the same thing with the opera. Ok, it’s too long and it's loud but it's also very beautiful if you love it as I do. So we tried to bring, through the Council of the Arts, which I created, different art experiences onto the campus because, quite frankly, going to the opera is prohibitively expensive. So are other expenses, even going to the theater in New York City is very, very costly. So we tried to create an environment in which the students would be exposed to different art forms and decide, “I like this one,” “I don’t like that one so much.” That kind of thing. Those were the things that we tried to enhance the cultural life, bring technology and create basically an environment of course when we went NCAA of the athletic programs. We also made a commitment there to increase our commitment and the support we’re
going to give to athletic programs. Because, although I was never an athlete, for obvious reasons [gestures towards herself] I really believe that it’s an important thing for school spirit and for the athletes to have the chance to compete and to succeed. Those are some of the big things I think were important and hopefully successful and helpful.

Cayla Caravella: I know you also said your many colleagues that you got to work with also made it so great of an experience. Who would you say had the greatest impact on you during your time at SJC?

Sister Elizabeth Hill: I’d have to single out three people. Sister George, to whom I referred earlier. She was my boss; for 17 years I was her assistant before I became the President and she basically taught me everything I know. She was a visionary woman, she was a courageous woman, she was a determined woman. When she took office in 1969 the college was in trouble and a number of small Catholic women’s colleges were going out of business. Sister George was determined that was not going to happen to St. Joseph’s College. As I said earlier she did a number of things, she introduced things [and] some were controversial, she had to fight through opposition from the alums. She had to fight through opposition from some faculty about different academic programs. She just kept going and she made it all happen.

The second person I would single out would be Sister Mary Florence Burns, who was another mentor of mine, who has been a lifelong friend, whose wisdom and insight have just been invaluable to me. To this day I still go and say, “Florence, what do you think about this?” She’ll tell me what she thinks and she’s also a very freeing person. She never tells you what she thinks
and then thinks you’re have to do it. She shares her experience, her wisdom, and then lets you go and make your own decision. Sometimes you’ll live to regret your decision, but that’s okay too. You learn from that.

The third person would be Sister Loretta McGrann, who you may not know because she retired from the position of provost three years ago, probably before any of you showed up. She was for many years based out in Patchogue as the Dean of that campus but Sister Loretta and I have been friends ever since we entered the convent together, we entered the same day, so we’ve been very dear friends. I had the administrative perspective and that was always about “how much is this going to cost” and she had the academic perspective, which always goes, “we have to do this for the students.” So we often would have little arguments, but they never test our friendship. She is another one who has been critical and pivotal to my experience here at St. Joseph’s College, and who added a great deal to the joy of the job.

Cayla Caravella: You also spoke at the end about the financial outlook on the things and “how much was this going to cost?” One of our next questions was what do you think influenced the increase in tuition from the 90s, maybe when you started working here as an assistant or as the president until now?

Sister Elizabeth Hill: The first thing I would blame is technology because I used it describe technology as a big black hole into which you just kept pouring money. Because you had to have what you have to have and as you know everything becomes obsolete the minute you buy it. And so that became a huge cost factor in our budget we recognized that we needed to do that.
The second thing, and I don’t mean to blame them, but I decided that when I became president that we were going to strengthen the faculty. By that I meant I wanted to have more faculty with a terminal degree, the doctorate or whatever was the appropriate degree in the discipline. Well, of course, if people have gone through all of the trouble of getting a PhD they don’t come for a salary as low as somebody who has a Bachelor's or a Masters. We don’t hire people with only Bachelor's. That was a different perspective and a new challenge and a new cost.

Running two campuses, of course, is very costly because we have to replicate many functions. We have to have two admissions offices, two Registrar’s Offices, two of this and two of that. Just managing the plant alone is very costly. And then the fourth thing that I think looking back became a significant cost factor was the increased focus on athletics because as you add teams you add costs. Transportation costs, getting teams to games and then getting them hopefully to post-season tournaments, which is always a desire. That’s what you want it to happen.

I’d say those are the four major areas that really forced us to...the other regular operational things. Of course, the Library, Mayumi, right? We always wanted to have the library be as [undecipherable] as possible. Faculty are encouraged to continue to add to the collection. It was basically a whole concatenation of events and things that came together.

We’re not unique in having to raise tuition on an annual basis. That is unfortunately the reality for most colleges like St. Joseph’s. In fact this afternoon I have a meeting with a number of the college presidents because I have this new job now; I’m working with the consortium of Catholic
colleges. Today the presidents are meeting and they all acknowledge that it’s unfortunate but they have no choice, they have to keep on passing on some of these costs onto the consumer which happens to be, I’m sorry to say, you folks. That’s my best answer to that one.

**Lubna Batool:** As a follow up to that question, since technology definitely has brought a lot of students to pay a certain amount of tuition. Do you think there are certain changes or improvements that SJC needs at the moment to meet the growing student population and to meet the students’ needs?

**Sister Elizabeth Hill:** I’m somewhat at a disadvantage in answering that because it has been three years since I’ve been operating in the day-to-day work at the College. I don’t know. I can only assume that the answer would be “yes” because as I said earlier technology is a never ending… It has this veracious appetite that just keeps wanting more and more. As they’ve introduced…For instance the Hospitality and Tourism Management Major, I would assume that that has also created new opportunities but also new cost factors in terms of the way that people have to be brought in as experts in that particular field as well as in the journalism field. You’re really dealing with people who are very successful out there in the [makes air quotes] “real world.” But they come to the College, I’m sure, expecting be remunerated at a level commensurate with their experience and with their success.

That’s really the best answer that I can give you, I’m sorry that I don’t really know. But tapping into back into my own experience, I just know that every year there was need and every year we tried to meet it. I’m sure that has been true these last three years and I hope and pray that it will
be true forever because that’s the reason that the school exists: for the students. That’s the only point. We get up in the morning and we go to work that is to provide the best possible educational and living environment for our students. If we’re not doing that we should shut down.

Lubna Batool: So for example the Bachelor’s in Nursing Program has recently been started and do you think that there are any additional programs or any facilities that we should incorporate to our SJC campus? Or anything like new buildings since the population of SJC is definitely growing day by day, every year you will see new students from all diversity?

Sister Elizabeth Hill: You mentioned Nursing. It’s very clear that right now they’re building new Nursing labs because one of the requirements when we introduced the Bachelor’s in Nursing...We used to have the Upper Level Program but when we introduced the four year program we had to commit to adding significantly to the office space for the nurses and the nursing faculty and also significantly add nursing labs. I know that’s happening now and I know there have been some adjustments to the library both here and out in Patchogue to accommodate these new labs.

They are very fascinating, they’re sim-labs, simulation labs. I don’t know if you’ve seen them in operation but they really are amazing. Where a nursing student can be in the OR and a crisis will happen...and then they’ll be expected to respond obviously... I saw one student, one time at another college up in Vermont and the poor student… A baby had been born and the baby was in distress so the nursing student got all involved in the baby. Meanwhile the mother was in worse
distress but the nursing student completely ignored the mother because she was so captured by the baby. Fortunately it was not a real mother or a real baby. So when she got the baby settled she found the mother was really in bad shape at that time and the Nursing instructor let this happen so the Nursing student could realize how this could’ve been a tragedy. Fortunately, it wasn’t, obviously. So that’s a very important thing happening.

I know that the journalism students need different kinds of facilities and I’m sure that they’re striving as best as they can to accommodate those. One more thing that’s true on both campuses is the lack of space. I don’t know really… we did on many occasions try to figure out ways in which we could expand this campus. But as you know we’re in a very dense residential area and there just isn’t a lot of place to go. We were very fortunate to be able to build the new gym but we had to sacrifice the parking, even though we have parking below it’s probably not as much as we used to have. So for us here in Brooklyn, space is a major problem. We can’t build up much higher because of the zoning regulations. We can’t build out because there’s no land to build on. I don’t really know exactly right now, other than perhaps trying to find some places for living facilities for students who might be interested in boarding, whether there’s a need specifically for additional academic buildings. I don’t know that, I’m not aware of it, that wasn’t the factor when I left but, it could be now, things change fast.

Yesseny Fernandez: So there have been many students that after graduating they keep contributing to St. Joseph’s College community. According to the Alumnagram, there was a strong alumni presence in the 1930s such as the Alumna Week program. Do you think the alumni relations have remained strong today?
Sister Elizabeth Hill: Oh, yes they have. I don’t know about the 1930s, I wasn’t here then. I do know, as I said my mother graduated from St. Joseph’s in 1921 and she was a loyal alumni until the days she died. She loved the College and her classmates loved the College and they were all benefactors as we use the term. That is they gave money and they gave time. My mother was a volunteer down here during the 1960s. In many ways the alumni have been very loyal and very faithful. I think we have a very good development office right now and one of their major focuses is to continue to reach out to alumni. One of the ways they’re trying to do that is by reaching out to students so that when you’re going through the undergraduate experience that you really identify with yourself not just as a student but as a lifelong member of the St. Joseph’s College community.

If you look at the annual report you’ll see there are pages and pages and pages of names of alumni who have given to the College within the range of their capacity. Some can give very major gifts and that’s wonderful. Most cannot because so many of our alums go into fields of service such as teaching and nursing and social work that don’t really have the high salary and bonuses that you might find if you had a whole bunch of people on Wall Street.

Nonetheless there is that willingness to pass on what they received here because there is a sense of gratitude that they got such a good education. My own classmates for instance established a scholarship when we were approaching our golden jubilee. Can’t even imagine we were [undecipherable] approaching it, but we did and we go past it. One of my classmates, who’s a very successful professor of history at the University of California in LA, internationally
recognized, said “you know, we really were so well prepared to go on for graduate work and in any field...” She was history but we had PhDs in Chemistry and it’s a small school. “We should really pay back.” So they established the scholarship and it’s now generating the equivalent of a full scholarship for a student every year. And so other classes are copying that.

The class of ‘69 has a scholarship and we’re encouraging each class as they get to a certain...You have to wait until people get to a point in their own personal lives where in many cases their own kids are on their own, or grown, and they don’t have the big tuition bills that they’re paying. But at that point then you can say to them, “Would you consider?” And many of them say, “Absolutely, because I’m so grateful for the education that I received and for what it enabled me to do and for what it's enabling me to do for my children. So let me help the next generation.”

As you know many of our students are, I don’t know how many of you are first generation here in this country but resources are limited for many of our students and so it’s very important that we keep the alumni involved and sensitive to these needs and to the possibility that they can make a difference in a student’s life. Also, the mentoring program is very important now that’s the second thing it's not just money but in many cases it's taking time to work with a student to really help them, direct them, guide them, give them some insight into what it would be like to be a lawyer, or somebody on Wall Street, or a physician or something like that. That’s a very important part of it, too.

Cayla Caravella: I know that you spoke about the change from an all women's college to co-ed and how a lot of the alumni, like we were just speaking about, were not...

Cayla Caravella: We were just talking about World War II and how it was a significant event in world history overall and thinking what thoughts you might have on how it affected the women and men and how that coincided with the change of co-ed and how that affected the role of women at SJC as a whole.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: I have to ask you why did you focus on World War II?

Cayla Caravella: The last interview was a little off too because the sister was like, “I wasn’t around in World War II.” But someone saw that as a big event in history and just wanted to know, not that you were there, what you might have thought, how that could have affected the College.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: I can only imagine but I know service has always been a very important thing at St. Joseph’s College so I would imagine that the students at that point probably go involved in Red Cross efforts or different kinds of volunteerism, but honestly I don’t know. I do know a lot more about the Vietnam War, because I lived through that. I think that had a major, major impact. Up until the 60s as you know, Catholic education was a fairly, it flowed evenly like a quiet river that just went flowing down gently from the source to the end. The Vietnam War brought tremendous dissention and disruption to virtually every campus in the country, including Catholic colleges. And so, my own classmates know, I graduated before the peak of
the rebellions which happened in 1968. I graduated in ‘64 but we [my classmates] were very aware of the fact that we were in the middle of this war and so we were down on Court Street picketing and doing things like that.

There was a much heightened awareness of international relations, of the role of the United States in the world, of whether this was in anyway a war that we should be involved in, and most of us felt, “no.” So I think that was really the beginning of an environment which was much more questioning, much more challenging...maybe healthier. Trying to figure out how do we as Catholics, as women, fit into this new social structure where there is so much turmoil and there is so much confusion.

People going to Canada people being killed. Day by day you’re seeing scenes coming from the war. Another thing that we had in the Vietnam War that they didn’t have in the Second World War was instant replay. We could see what was happening over there because you had your photo journalists who were right on the spot filming things. In the Second World War, they got it third or fourth hand. They had newsreels that they might see on a Saturday if they went to a movie but it was much, if I can use the word, neater and tidier. They didn’t really see the reality.

So I think that the patriotism that permeated the country in the Second World War everybody was on board, everybody was sacrificing. You had your liberty gardens where people were growing their own vegetables and you had people not driving their car because they were saving fuel for the army. All of these things. War bonds were being bought by everybody no matter how wealthy they were. None of that in the Vietnam War because the country was really torn apart.
That to me began to really affect all women and certainly the women here at St. Joseph’s College at that time.

**Lubna Batool:** Adding on to that question, I remember I was here myself in 2001 when the 9/11 attack happened and I know that was a hard time for everyone. Especially as a Catholic tradition that we have here and we respect all religions and all ethnicities, do you think there was a certain kind of fear in that period of time or how was there a support system where everyone was united and there were possible programs, or anything offered, or meetings offered to come together and discuss this matter?

**Sister Elizabeth Hill:** Well we certainly had many gatherings as a result of it. Some, to do exactly what you just said, to be together as a community, to pray together, to support each other. It was a shattered time. Nobody who lived through would ever forget that day. You exactly where you were, what you were doing, with whom you were speaking, when you heard about the first plane, and then when you heard about the second plane, and then you knew. I think the College pulled together beautifully. We did not have then as many Muslim students as we have now but we had a few and I think we reached out immediately. Students reached out to their friends and faculty and administration reached out to assure them that we didn’t blame them. We didn’t equate them with what had happened. That we understood that they were as dismayed and as heartbroken as we were. And so I think, it was certainly a heartbreaking time we lost several of our recent graduates of the college and so we had a ceremony to memorialize them over near St. Angela Hall.
We had a number of different things, I remember speaking at different things, always with that effort to reach out and just be reconciling. The sisters of Saint Joseph who have been part of this College for its entire history of 100 years, our mission is to be instruments of unifying love and reconciliation. It was very important to us as the leaders of the institution that we create that environment, that we immediately cut off any blame games or harsh retaliation or anything like that. And I think, I hope, we never really know what’s going on in somebody else’s heart but I hope that we were somewhat successful in embracing the community in a way that enabled us to go forward together. I think the fact that we had a number of young Muslim women come is, to me, a sign that we’ve been successful in doing that. That they do feel at home here, which is important.

Lubna Batool: Also as an ACES student myself, I’d like to know what inspired the founding of the ACES program and how did this affect promoting diversity on campus and the student admissions process?

Sister Elizabeth Hill: Well you can talk about that better than I can me because you’re there. Are you also, Yessey?

Yesseny Fernandez: Yes, ACES student.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: That really began as a combination of our desire to diversify the population precisely and to increase our student body. We realized that there were a number of very bright, gifted young men and women out there who would prosper in a place like St. Joseph’s College,
which is small, student centered, that would provide them with the kinds of opportunity and back up that would enable them to succeed.

I have to credit Sister Margaret Buckley with having the idea. She didn’t name it ACES, one of the alumni named it ACES because we had a little ad hoc committee of women who had been very successful in the public school system, that were superintendents or principals so we brought them together and said, “How would you do this if you were doing it?” So they gave a few suggestions and we kind of used most of them and one of the suggestions was to call it the ACES program so you would all think that you were aces, which is a good thing to be. So that’s really it. It was a very simple effort. It started small and then we were fortunate enough to have a benefactor Dick Dunn from California and his wife, Marygrace Calhoun Dunn (‘46), had died very suddenly and very recently and he was bereft really.

I knew that he wanted to do something to remember her here at her alma mater. So I went to him with the suggestion that he might endow, or at least give the start-up funds, for this program and he loved the idea. So that’s how we put together the idea, which came from a whole bunch of people and we got the start-up funds and then of course since then we’ve been continuing to try to support it through fundraising and, you know, just keeping it going. How many are in it now?

Lubna Batool: From my class, the freshmen class, I know there’s about 100 to 150.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: In ACES?
Lubna Batool: Yeah, in ACES.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: Wow, that’s great.

Lubna Batool: Every year they grow, each year so the population, I was mentioning there’s a lot of diversity on campus and that definitely has brought new cultural events as well on campus.

Yesseny Fernandez: Wait, like the class together? Over 100?

Lubna Batool: Yeah, I’m not too sure about the exact number but it definitely does increase every year. I talked to one of the ACES advisors and they did mention that.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: That’s good.

Yesseny Fernandez: But, I believe that it’s like maybe 20-30 students per semester.

Lubna Batool: Oh, really, that’s probably your class. For us there’s been an increase in our freshman year 2020 class.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: Well, it doesn’t matter. The important thing is that it continues to grow. That’s good.

Yesseny Fernandez: Yes, definitely.
Yesseny Fernandez: Ok, so you have mentioned your role as a Catholic person in the College so what were some of your reasons for choosing to become a sister? How do you feel about the diminishing numbers of nuns in the College?

Sister Elizabeth Hill: Oh well, this question, “why did you become a nun?” I always say to people, “why did you marry your husband?” I rest it there. I mean it seemed the right thing to do, it makes me happy, I found a great joy in it. What my motives were when I was 22, I don’t know. I finished college and I got my Masters before I entered the convent so I was a little bit older than some of the people. It just seemed to be the right thing. I admired the sisters with whom I’d been blessed to have here as teachers at St. Joseph’s so it was really just a sense of...I wanted to serve, I wanted to have that kind of life.

At the diminishment of different religious congregations, it’s, of course, a sad thing for us. Obviously, I would love to have more young women entering so that we could see that the things we valued and have tried to create and to bring forth and to share with others will continue but it doesn’t seem to be happening. I think we simply have to say, “It’s all God’s work.” I say to people, “If God wanted convents to be filled, they would be.” So I think that God has a plan and I think his plans include much more involvement of lay people in the life of the church.

And I think Pope Francis is very much attuned to that where he’s reaching out and embracing a greater diversity of people, possibly even the idea of having married priests. Breaking open some
of the old norms and seeing more flexibility. So we don’t know what the future’s going to bring but we’re doing our best to live faithfully day by day and let God’s will be done.

**Mayumi Miyaoka:** Hold on one second. Just one second.

**Sister Elizabeth Hill:** Okay. Technology issues.

**Mayumi Miyaoka:** Yes, technology. Excuse me. It should be recording again, you’re welcome to chat.

**Sister Elizabeth Hill:** Oh, we can chat.

[Laughter]

**Lubna Batool:** It’s a beautiful day today.

**Sister Elizabeth Hill:** It’s getting grayer out there actually. I’m looking at the sky.

**Yesseny Fernandez:** Yeah, the flowers are coming up. Spring is my favorite season.

**Cayla Caravella:** I like summer too.

**Sister Elizabeth Hill:** Springs...
Cayla Caravella: Spring and summer.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: [Springs] have gotten shorter and shorter. Winter lasts longer and then the summer comes and we go right to...

Cayla Caravella: Yeah, spring and fall I love both of them but I feel each one of them is like two weeks.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: They’re disappearing yeah. Well, that’s why I find it so amazing that people really deny climate change because obviously something’s happening. That’s quite major and…

Lubna Batool: Yeah that was one of my questions that I wanted to ask after this was done. As one of the things I’m really concerned about is what we should do. As the new generation, I think we have all of the resources and we should definitely be doing something. I know that we recently had a speaker come in, Caitlyn Shetterly, and she spoke about GMO foods and how they’re harming the planet and that really got me thinking of what we do in our daily lives and how that can impact us in the future as well and future generations.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: It’s good to think about and it’s good to act on it as well. When we built the Hill Center we went for LEEDs certification and that was important. We wanted to both do the right thing and also make a statement that we were concerned about it. I would say we all make
choices everyday about how we use fossil fuels. I know my carbon footprint is probably shocking because I drive a great deal for this job I have I have to drive out to Molloy. Yesterday I was out in Brentwood. I’m on the road a lot. Are we alright?

Mayumi Miyaoka: One second. Actually we might have to continue with just the sound. If it’s okay.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: That would be fine. I never like having my picture taken.

[Laughter]

Mayumi Miyaoka: So this is still going so if you could… Alright, sorry about the interruption.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: That’s okay.

Mayumi Miyaoka: So this will still be recording but this camera is unfortunately, the memory is full, so...

Sister Elizabeth Hill: Okay.

Mayumi Miyaoka: Yes.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: I talk too much.
Mayumi Miyaoka: No, it’s ok. So just the sound, okay?

Cayla Caravella: I know you were speaking about being a sister and your decision and all that went into that and I was just wondering… I know it’s the Sisters of St. Joseph’s so is that specific to the College, or is it a separate…? Did you have to go here or teach here or am I just a little bit off hitting?

Sister Elizabeth Hill: Ok, there are many, many different orders in the church. The Sisters of St. Joseph are one. There are the Dominicans, the Sisters of Mercy. Gazillions. The Sisters of St. Joseph are an international community for all over the world. In Africa, in India, Asia, South America, here, Canada.

But we all go back to one little town in France called Le Pui. L-E P-U-I. And there we were founded in 1650 by a group of six very simple French women, who wanted to live together, pray together, and serve. That was their...serve God, serve their fellow people. So that’s where it all started and it grew from there, and as each group got large enough a Bishop in an adjacent diocese would say, “Can some of you come over and work in my place?” So it went from Le Pui to Anasti to Claremont to Chambre all over France.

During the French Revolution, all religious orders were suppressed and we actually had six of our sister go to the guillotine. So the others all went, scattered and went back to their homes and then back in 1806 the Bishop of Leon asked Mother Fontbonne, I don’t know if you’ve heard of
Fontbonne Hall, Mother Fontbonne to re-establish the order. So she did and in 1836 the Bishop of Saint Louis, in Missouri, asked the Sisters of St. Joseph to come to America. So six Sisters of St. Joseph came to America and they were in Saint Louis and they taught children who were deaf. There probably was the measles epidemic or something like that so that this whole problem was children who were deaf.

And from there we spread to all of the United States. So there are literally thousands of us all over the world. I belong to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood because as each individual, new place was established it became independent of the others. For instance we have Boston, we have Erie, Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, we have Brentwood. Each one a separate entity. And then, but we do get together. We have a common history, common traditions, and a common purpose. So that’s a long winded way of saying how we got here.

Cayla Caravella: Thank you.

Lubna Batool: Also going back to when we were talking about maintaining the Catholic values, what are some of the challenges or barriers that you think that we face in the future in maintaining our Catholic values and the traditions that we have.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: Well, I think obviously the world is filled with contradictions and I think that most of our students come from families where they have been well grounded in the kinds of values that....It doesn’t really matter whether you’re Catholic or you’re Jewish or you’re Muslim
or you’re Protestant. It’s really what kind of person are you and what kind of contributions do you want to make to the world?

When you say Catholic values, they’re gospel values. They’re values of compassion, the value of kindness. The values of concern for the other. Put somebody else ahead of you. Put his concerns ahead of you. Go the extra mile. Do onto others as you would have them do onto you. These are all things that we share as human beings. We, as Catholics, approach it specifically through the lens of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Other faith traditions, approach the same values through their own particular lens. But I think as people who are walking this journey one this planet together, you know we have concern for each other.

We have now concern for mother earth and are we destroying our homeland, which is everyone’s homeland. It doesn’t matter whether you’re an American or a Russian or a Zimbabwean. We all own this land and we all are... obliged really to care for it tenderly and to not make decisions that will not cause it harm. I think that’s something we’ve learned lately because I think here, especially in America, we have so much. We have so much water, we have so much everything. Wealth in abundance that I think it’s only been the last 20-30 years that we’ve said, “wait a minute.” You know polluting our streams, we are doing serious harm to our children. Lead poisoning and unsafe water in Appalachia in places where coal sledge has been allowed to go into the streams. All of these things we hadn’t thought about and so now we’re thinking about, and so I think certainly as Catholics, but also all of us.

Lubna Batool: Human beings.
Sister Elizabeth Hill: As human beings. And we may approach it from a particular focus or through a particular lens but it’s, we’re all about the same thing, I think ultimately. I hope.

Lubna Batool: Yes.

Yesseny Fernandez: Yes. With all of that said, what do you wish for the future of St. Joseph’s College?

Sister Elizabeth Hill: I wish it to endure, to prosper for another hundred years at least, and above all I wish it to be faithful to its mission, which is to provide a high quality affordable education for men and women who are eager to go from here to go out and change the world and make it a better place.

Interviewers: Thank you.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: You’re welcome and thank you all very much. We’re done?

Yesseny Fernandez: Yes.

Sister Elizabeth Hill: Good.

Mayumi Miyaoka: Great, thank you very much. Sorry about the technical difficulties.