Voices of SJC: Oral History

Fall 2017

St. Joseph’s College

Transcribed by McEntegart Hall Library/Archives
Preface

In Fall 2017, nine honors students participated in gathering three oral histories from Dr. Thomas G. Travis, Dr. Carol Hayes, and S. Loretta McGrann supported by McEntegart Hall Library/Archives. 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.

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Interviewee’s name and contact information: Sister Loretta McGrann, CSJ, Ph.D.
Interviewer’s names, affiliation, and contact information: Lubna Batool, Drishti Kalia, and Valentina Velez Valencia, St. Joseph’s College Honors Program Students
Date of interview: Tuesday, December 1, 2017 at 12:00 p.m.
Location of interview: Founders Hall, St. Joseph’s College, 232 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn, New York

List of acronyms: LB = Lubna Batool (interviewer), DK = Drishti Kalia (interviewer), LK = Lauren Kehoe (moderator), LM = S. Loretta McGrann (interviewee), MM = Mayumi Miyaoka (moderator), VV = Valentina Velez Valencia (interviewer)

LB: I’d like to thank you, first, for giving us the opportunity to interview you. I’m Lubna Batool. I’m a sophomore here.

LM: Say your name again.

LB: Lubna.

LM: Lubna?

LB: Yes, Lubna. Right here [rustle of paper, presumably showing her name].

LM: Ah.

LB: Yes, just like Luna. Like the moon, I often say that, yes. I’m a sophomore as a Nursing major.

LM: Oh, nice.

VV: Hi, I’m Valentina Velez. I’m a sophomore as well, but I’m a Math[ematics] major with a concentration in Science.

LM: Very good!

DK: My name is Drishti Kalia and I’m a freshman right now. My major is Psychology.

LM: Very good.

DK: Yes, I’m international. I came from India a few months ago.
LM: Very nice. You’re living in the dorms?
Yes, I’m living in the dorms.

I love it.

See, isn’t that great; it’s a very exciting thing to do.

Yes.

Do you have family here?

No.

None, just you? Oh, my goodness. Keep an eye on her.

Yes, I know.

Saint Joseph's is my new family now.

Is it? Good, I’m glad. I’m glad you feel at home—that you’re not too lonesome. You must be lonesome, but not too lonesome. Okay, let’s go.

Officially [laughing].

This recording was made as part of the Oral History Project by St. Joseph’s College Honors Program students in the Fall 2017 semester. It was recorded on December 1, 2017 at 12:00 p.m. in Founders Hall; located at 232 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. The interviewers are Lubna Batool, Drishti Kalia, and Valentina Velez. The narrator is Sister Loretta McGrann.

Oh, thank you. I didn’t know I was the narrator. I thought I was just the interviewee.

[laughter] Good.

Yes. We would like to just start off with a basic kind of generalized question: What was the most important change brought to SJC during your time?

I came as the Long Island campus began, so that was a big item. When Sister Virginia Therese [Callahan] asked me if I would like to teach at Saint Joseph’s, I was thinking here because I lived in Brooklyn. I thought, This would be great. Next thing I know, I’m out in
Brentwood—that was where the Long Island campus began. Next thing you know, I’m out in Patchogue, which is even farther away, out in suburbia, and I was a city girl from head to toe!

The Patchogue campus—there must have been a need for it. It had a certain niche because it just blossomed and grew and blew up, practically, in no time. When I start—opened the Patchogue campus, we had about 326 students/327 students and then in no time at all it was way up. It had a place on the Island and it had a value-centered orientation that people wanted. It had small classes. It had personalized attention.

All those things that you come here for, the Island also had, even though it was big. Probably, on the Island, we identify more with departments than we do with the whole school because we’re big. If you’re a psychology major, that’s your home. If you’re an English major that’s your home and so in that sense it breaks down as small communities. Then the clubs and things pull it together. It still has that personal communal touch.

The classes are still small; anywhere from 12 [students] to maybe 30 at max. 30 is a small class when you’re looking at Stony Brook [University] with 300 in a class. We tried to keep it small and as you moved up and hit your upper level courses, of course, the classes got smaller. Your seminar classes were like seven, maybe. You did your thesis. The faculty divided it up and you did your thesis in a very small group; very intense. We tried to preserve the same quality of education even though the school is bigger in numbers and size, I guess. Right?

**LB:** Is that kind of the certain amount that we try to keep every year when we are processing the admissions for students—that class size?

**LM:** The admissions brings in the students and then we look at the numbers, right? Then we break it down. Hopefully each writing class will have no more than 20, each composition class will have no more than 20. We try to keep the classes between 20 and 30. Then as you move up—again—because you’re going into your seminars and your more specific classes, you go down to somewhere between seven and 14.

When I was the Dean out there and I was doing the classes, I didn’t want to go under seven—because mathematically that would pay the teachers’ salary [laughing]. I said, “We need seven.” We didn’t always make it because some students needed something that you had to give to them and it might have been fewer students or one student that needed this class, so you gave them that class. I tried to keep seven the smallest, because I had done my math.
LB: The second question I had was: What made you want to become a sister at SJC? Do you think that the diminishing number of Sisters at the College has an impact on our mission and what we follow as the institution?

LM: Yes, let’s start with part one, maybe.

LB: Yes.

LM: I was teaching in the inner city and I enjoyed it. I taught, I did the teen club, I did the choir, the ladies’ auxiliary. I had a great time, but at a certain point I was feeling sort of brain dead and I was restless. I pulled up behind the first Dean of the Patchogue campus, Sister Virginia Therese at a community meeting. She parked; I parked behind her. She knew me from different committees and things. I got out of my car—she turned to me and she said, “Would you like to teach at Saint Joseph’s College?” I’m thinking, Oh, yes. I’m thinking Brooklyn, because that’s where I was living. Next thing you know I am going for the interview and doing this. I said, I don’t want to teach unless I can get a doctorate, because I think if you teach in college that you need to be well prepared and I had been out of school for a while. I had gotten my B.A. and my Masters and I was teaching on the elementary school level, really—seventh and eighth grade and a year in high school. I asked to go back to school and that was fine. I asked to go to Stony Brook, because I knew I was a very active person. Some people are scholars: they can sit with the books for their whole entire lives. I like studying and I like reading, but I also like being out with people, doing things, and so forth. I asked to go to Stony Brook, which was down the road—which meant I could teach a class and still go to graduate school.

When I was in Patchogue I was—I guess you’d say that the Director of Student Services. Sister Teresa Avila was the Dean, in Brooklyn, and they needed somebody to do Student Services out there, so I did Student Services. I taught two English classes in my first years out there. That was an interesting combination of things to do. I liked teaching better than Student Services. I’m not so good with identity crises. If you have one, good luck, because I don’t know how to help [laughing]. The romances and the this and the that. I wasn’t good at that. I wasn’t understanding and kind. I was like, Get over it—You’ll meet somebody next week—don’t worry about it. People need more than that and I don’t have that kind of counselor personality. I think, Read a good book; you’ll feel better. I asked to move from that into straight teaching and studying for the doctorate. Stony Brook was like 12 miles away so I could get over there fast and get back fast for classes.

LB: The second part of the question was: Do you think that the diminishing number of Sisters has an impact on the college mission?
LM: I was big on mission. I was the person who pushed the mission the most because with all the Sisters around they didn’t have to really do that, but out in Patchogue we didn’t have all of the Sisters. I also lived with some Sisters who worked for a Catholic health center and they were in charge of mission identity, so that had been sort of burned into my brain—that the mission has to be upfront. All those banners and things you see at graduation and investiture and so forth: they sort of began with me. I had a few cohorts out in Patchogue and one of them made the first banner, the “Integrity” banner. It was just beautiful. Then we sort of added to it each year and each year we just keep circling around those values—to try to brainwash you, actually [laughter]. No, to get you to understand that no matter what you’re doing in class, all the learn[ing]—you’re going to forget things—but one hopes you don’t forget those values or practicing those values. That’s the mission. Intellectual and spiritual values will certainly cover your academic life—that you keep reading, you keep thinking, you’re critical in your decision making. The mission was very important to me because I’d seen what it had done to shape the Catholic health care system in Brooklyn and Queens. That was a big deal. I was the mission lady [laughing].

LB: Even as a Nursing major, I had to take prerequisites. You have to take Bio[logy] and all that; Statistics and things that you need in that major. At the same time, I’m taking Ethics—that’s one of the courses we had to take. That kind of puts you in the perspective of what you’re trying to do and what your goal is instead of getting too involved in the small details—remembering what your end goal is. I think that’s very important.

LM: The person who is the recipient of all your care—

LB: Yes, definitely.

LM: Whether you're a teacher or you’re going to be a nurse—whatever you’re going to do, it should be person-centered in a way.

LB: Right.

DK: Who has had the greatest impact on you during your time at SJC?

LM: Oh, so many—certainly the Sisters. Sister Virginia Therese who asked me to come. Sister John Raymond had a big impact because she was the assistant to the President on the Patchogue campus. She did a lot of things out there and was very present to that campus; she had a big influence on me. Sister Elizabeth [A.] Hill and I have been best friends since we were postulants in the [inaudible] Brentwood. In that sense, she had the best friends influence on me. Sister Margaret Buckley I also knew from the [inaudible]. Sister Mary Florence [Burns] I got to know over the phone because when I became the Dean out there I
didn’t have a clue what to do. I mean, I knew what I wanted to do in many ways, but there were certain legalities, procedures, and policies that I was not all that familiar with. *What do you do when this happens or that happens?* I would call her every day because I would always have a question. I called her one time because we had parking problems (*laughter*). The students were parking anywhere and everywhere because they didn’t want to park over in the Church and take the bus over. We put extra parking in the church parking lot. I called her one day and I said, “You know they’re parked all over the place. I’m going to take their licenses and give them a ticket on their bill.” She thought I was going to take their license plates off the cars. So she said to me, “I think you ought to pass that by Sister Elizabeth Hill and see if that’s legal.” I’m thinking, [inaudible]. I called Elizabeth and then I find out that’s what she thought I was going to do—go around and take their license plates and then they’d be in trouble. I should’ve thought of that myself, but I didn’t. I didn’t. Sister Elizabeth and I have been friends and worked together in the College for a long time.

**DK:** Can you tell us more about your relationship with her?

**LM:** Well, it’s a relationship of friendship. We’re both English majors in the undergraduate [program teaching] and English majors think a certain way as Psychology and Math majors do. Approach life a certain way and enjoy the same things, theater, books, and lectures, and things. We share that as well as we have a good time together. We go on vacation together, still. We have a group of—there are three of us, and I can’t tell you how many years—. [We have gone] on vacation together every year; we share that. We usually go to Vermont because up in Western Vermont there is a monastery that is very open and very nice to go to, to church. All around the area, it’s beautiful and it’s very touristy. The town is touristy, the area is touristy. There’s a little theater, there’s music festivals. There’s interesting things happening there. It’s like a small town-country kind of way. We get to see a lot of things and do a lot of things. Go to the beach and that kind of stuff.

**DK:** My second question is: How has your role as the Provost been different to that of the Academic Vice President?

**LM:** They’re the same, okay? What happened was, I was the Academic Vice President after Sister Mary Florence and one day Sister Elizabeth thought that she would like to change the title to Provost. The job didn’t change and it became Provost. I guess it’s a more common term for the role that I played and when you’re the provost you oversee the academic side of the College. The poor President has to go out and raise money, build buildings, charm people, and all those things, but I got to do the academic side, which I liked. It’s like being a glorified Principal. You supervise the faculty; you help introduce new curriculum. You do all kinds of things academically. You work with more students
when you’re the Dean; when you’re Provost you don’t get quite as much of that. I sort of missed that. It’s not different from Academic Vice President: it’s the same thing.

DK: Okay.

VV: Can you tell us a bit more about your role in SJC’s 1992 College-Wide Governance Study Committee?

LM: Which one is this, 1982?

VV: 1992 College-Wide Governance Study Committee.

LM: I’m not even sure I remember that [laughter]. I do remember the governance. The faculty wanted, I guess, more of a role in governance and so out of that governance committee—. It really became more of a discussion than making anything new happen. It was enriching and reminding everybody what the governance structure is. The governance structure, I mean the board of trustees—they’re in charge, period, amen. Then the faculty—all the academic life of the school belongs to the faculty. They hire, they develop curriculum, and they approve of new programs and courses.

All of the academic faculty does that. The rest of the administration—. I would be the head of the faculty and the Dean’s under me, and the Faculty Chairs, and then the faculty people. The rest of the group makes the school work. You have your people raising money and you have our people doing budgets, fixing buildings, buying property, and schmoozing the politicians. Doing all of those things—none of which would I like to do. My role’s more internal; it’s an internal role. You’re not so much a public face of the College, you’re more the public face in the College. You’re not on the out…—. I didn’t have to go out and do—.

Once in a while I would accompany Sister Elizabeth, but I didn’t have to do anything. She works very hard at cultivating people, to get them interested in the College; so they would give the College money; so we could give scholarships and we could do buildings. I was with her one day and we were sitting at dinner with these very lovely donors and the woman [donor] just took an envelope and slid it over to Sister Elizabeth and it was a big donation. I said, “This job’s easy—you go out to dinner [laughter]; they hand you an envelope.” She [Sister Elizabeth] was all, Rawr rawr rawr [makes disgruntled sound effects] [laughter]. No, but she’s really very good at it and has been very good at it. I’m going to presume the next new President seems to take a great interest in this part. So that you will have what you need and not need to have an exorbitant tuition for a private school.
LB: In regards to tuition and scholarships, how do you think that the students play a role? How can we prove to the Alumni and the community outside of the College that we’re capable of—the amount that you give us, it is going to somewhere good? How can students play a role?

LM: I think the people who give us money, a lot of them were students so they know. A lot of them kind of know you from different events. If you were invited to a luncheon or something—we used to have luncheons in the city, I guess we still do.

LB: Yes.

LM: If you got to those luncheons and you do a little schmoozing and thanking them for their support—but they are very proud of you because they know what you do. They know that you go to school, that you work, and that you have family responsibilities. It’s not easy for you to pay a private school tuition. They are very aware of that. Many of them came here themselves in the same position, but the education they got enabled them to go really far. Therefore they’re paying it back like Chris[opher] Carroll, the head of your Board. He came here on a scholarship and Sister Elizabeth used her influence to get him into St. John’s on a scholarship for law and then he just took off. He’s a very well-known, capable lawyer. International law, I think he does. He’s very grateful. He’s head of the Board. He’s giving back.

I guess what we ask of scholarship students is: get out there and do your best and if you get a chance remember where you came from and give back. Somebody’s behind you who needs that help now. When they leave, they’ll do great things, so help them out a bit there. That’s how we approach alumni with that. They appreciate what they got here and they do give back. Even if you only go to the luncheon in the court thing. They may not be able to give a lot of money because a lot of them are teachers. How much do they make and what is their pension? They give—way into their 90s they’re still sending in checks, giving, going to the lunch, and supporting the old the old alma mater. There’s a very loyal band of alumni out there. When it was Women’s College, they were very tight. If you went to Saint Joseph’s, you were very tight. Now since it’s gotten bigger—and two campuses and such—it’s a little less tight, but they’re still very, very loyal and happy to give because they know you’re going to do great things.

VV: Do you believe majors in the Liberal Arts and traditional fields like English and History are slowly becoming less prominent in today’s society? Can you explain why?

LM: I don’t know if they’re becoming less prominent. I know people say, “Well, what are you going to do with an English major?” That was my father. I had a friend who was a Philosophy major; her father was really over the moon with horror. [all laugh and LM
imitates his voice] “How much do philosophers make?” I know from my own experience—because of a liberal arts education, I was able to do many things. Many things, because you just have this very broad vision. I’ve actually taught Science on the junior high school level. I was very good at it because I had to study it; we did experiments and we had a great old time. I learned a lot while doing it, but I had already learned how to learn. I knew how important it was that the students have hands-on activities and knew how to do the dissecting and what not—that I liked it [laughter]. I was well prepared to teach a general curriculum. Then when I went into high school—only for a year in high school—I was well prepared to teach the literature and writing courses.

I always worked until now I guess, the last 10 years or so. I worked in Saint Joseph’s and in a Parrish. I did the choir, I did the youth club, and ladies auxiliary. I had a great old time doing that, but none of it—. It was like one thing for me. When I did my dissertation, I did it on Toni Morrison. I worked on African American Literature, because I was working in a community that was African American. The people in the books were like the people in the community. It came together for me in a very nice way.

I’ve always tried to do that. Liberal education kind of helps you put disparate things together and make them work and enjoy them. Read all kinds of things, whether its science or ah—. Math: I did not have Math. I tested out of Math when I entered college and it wasn’t my favorite subject. I’m testing out. Why would I take a course I tested out of? I was a stupid college kid; I should’ve taken that course [laughing]. I tested out of it and didn’t take it. That’s a little weak area of mine. If from an old wise age I look back and say, I should’ve taken that math because I could have used it, but I didn’t. I said, “If you’re going to let me out of it, I’m getting out of it [laughter].” Yes.

LB: You mentioned a little bit about you teaching in high school: transitioning and growing from there. What are some of the differences that you see in the education system when you were a teacher before and now?

LM: I taught high school. I taught seventh and eighth grade in the inner city where you had a lot of room to be creative. This was back in the early 70s. Our school had a program called Project Plan and that was: computers generated the coursework. The students each had tested and they each had their own individual level. You had a class of students from anywhere from the fourth grade to the 12th almost, in terms of curriculum. You had to put them in groups, but I had learned all that, actually, in Brentwood College when I was a Sister. We had very good teachers of Education. They taught us how to group students, how to do individual needs—so I knew how to do all that when went into the classroom. I worked on that in seventh and eighth grade. I only taught in [Bishop] Kearney [High School] for a year. Those girls were very smart, I mean you didn’t have to teach them, they
were just incredible. They were a lot of fun to teach, but then I went back to the inner city because that’s where I really wanted to be. I did that. Then when I was getting a little brain dead there—this is when Sister Virginia met me and asked me, “Would I teach in the College,” and I asked to study, to do that.

LB: Yes. Is there any part of past curriculums you would like to see now? Maybe a change or—?

LM: I certainly think you—well, you are using and you need to continue to use technology. We didn’t really have that. I think you really have to use that and use it well. I need more training in it myself. Especially, how do you use technology in the classroom effectively, rather than just putting on the old film strip projector. How do you use it effectively in the classroom, is something that I think is very important—how do you use effectively it for your research because you can really—. Things that we couldn’t get, you can go on the internet and you can get.

When Sister Mary Florence was doing her dissertation, she always talks about sending to England to get the manuscript that she needed to do the work she was doing. She had to send to England and get it from that library, back to this library, to her [Sister Mary], and then back to England. She stayed here in New York and did work on Shakespeare and on editions by doing all this back and forth. Now, on the internet it’s all there for you, which I think—it’s really a great gift. Also, it’s hard because you have to sort it out and pick out the best. If you’re learning in your classes how to choose the best source, not the easiest, or “fake news [laughter].” Is that the words we use today? That’s good because you can really travel the world from in front of your computer and get what you need. Even talk to whom you want to talk to—and set up face-to-face with some noted author, historian, or a scientist, which I have never done. Why don’t we try that [laughing]? Let’s pick somebody and see who we can get.

LB: It’s incredible what technology can do.

LM: Yes.

LB: It’s hard though. When I research for a topic I’m doing—in the Library we have the different sections where you could choose out what kind of website you want to go to and where do you want to research. Who do you want to—specifically, like you said—get the information from? There’s a lot of things out there and it’s hard to choose and see who you can trust.
LM: That’s probably one of the most important things nowadays because all of this information’s coming at you. Information or false information. You have to be able to sort it out, you have to be able to think critically, and look for certain language that will give you a clue, *This is a nut job here* [laughing], or, *This is a scholar*. Get the name and research the person—

LB: Definitely.

LM: —before you use their material. Yes, you have to work at it, but it’s wonderful that you have it.

LB: It is, yes. We’re grateful. Yes.

LM: I wonder sometimes if these very, in quotes, “*important*” scholars, writers, and people wouldn’t be happy to hear from a student who wanted to talk to them on FaceTime or one of those things—or have an email?

When I was out in Suffolk, there was a class here taught by, she’s an Education teacher, Anne Mulligan? She was teaching at Kearney at the time and she was teaching the Senior Honors [students]. They were doing projects and they were going to do a project on Toni Morrison. She got in touch with me over the email and they developed questions. They sent me questions and I answered their questions. It was fun. It was fun for me. It was fun for them. I wanted to come into the city and meet them, but that plan fell apart—It was a shame, because you got that friendly on the computer [laughing]. I’ll tell you the story of my life while I’m telling you something else. It was a very nice experience and we probably should use it more in that way to talk to and get in touch with people we want to.

LB: Yes.

DK: So before the establishment of the ACES Center, what other opportunities were available for the incoming international students at the College?

LM: You know I’m not as familiar with the Brooklyn campus because I started in Brentwood and Patchogue—we did not really have an international community. We had to work, even to get a diverse community. We established a program out there for students from diverse cultures. They weren’t really—. At the time I was there we had a few Spanish students, but not a lot. We were trying to reach out to those communities because, remember, we were a private school and the tuition was prohibitive for some of our students.
We had a special scholarship program. We could give 10 scholarships for students recommended by their guidance counselors as hardworking and smart, but just didn’t have the money to come to a private school. We had those scholarships, which I thought was good and then that began to build diversity among students there. You can’t go out into today’s world and not be able to handle different languages and cultures. Not that I can speak them, but I’m not so put off by difference as maybe in suburbia you are. When I went to Suffolk, at that time, Suffolk was the most segregated county in the United States. In the center were all Hispanic and African American peoples. On the coast were all the white, rich [people]. They had the beach, the sea, the ocean, and the bay. It was very segregated. To try to make the college more diverse, which we needed—. You cannot have a good education unless you’re in some kind of diverse population, if at all possible, because that’s the way the world is. It’s going global and you have to be able to deal with difference. Our students were not used to difference; they were in a segregated county. We had to work hard on that piece.

DK: Yes, there are more international students now?

LM: Not, international [students], no.

DK: Not international?

LM: It’s Long Island and we don’t have—we didn’t have dorms. We have dorms now? We’re getting dorms—We have dorms? I don’t know. They were talking about building dorms and I think that they maybe they finally got one built—I’m not sure. I won’t say it on tape—I’ll tell you later what I think about that.

We didn’t have international students. Once in a while somebody came, lived with a family and came, but not to any degree that would be helpful. So it was hard out there to get diversity because it was a very segregated island and everybody kept to their own. We worked hard on it. We joined different groups and we took students to different places. I went to—I think it was an NAACP luncheon with a group of students—a diverse group of students. I walked in with the lady in charge, whom I knew and there were our white students sitting here and our minority students sitting here. They were not sitting together. I thought, Oooh, but then I thought, when I go into a community meeting with all the Sisters, like 500 or something, I look around and I see a table where I know those people and I go to that table. It’s sort of normal, but it’s hard when you’re trying to encourage dialogue. I think it’s better now. I think the athletics helps because you’re on a team. You don’t care who there as long as they catch the ball and you win [laughing]. I think the teams are good and having the gym here; the teams, they help a lot.
DK: How has community service changed throughout the years? How has helping the community brought you new opportunities or changed your course in life?

LM: Are we talking about me or the students?

DK: About you.

LM: About me. I’m the oldest of nine children and I’m significantly older than the others because I was born before World War II and they were born after World War II. There’s a little age gap there, but my mother was big on, “You’re not going to sit around in the summer and do nothing.”

DK: Yes.

LM: So she sent me to work with the Trinitarian Sisters in Brooklyn and they worked downtown and at Saint Peters—[this is] before everything got gentrified and fancy dance-y: it was a very poor neighborhood and I worked with them. We went and visited the homes and brought people what they needed and ran a Bible school. From there, I got used to diversity and liked it. Kids are kids. One of my worst experiences, in that summer, was I was working also with other counselors who were from that community. They were African American and Hispanic and we went—the Sister had family who had a home in a beach community, which shall remain nameless. She wanted to take everybody there at the end of the summer. They would go to her family’s house and there would be a barbeque and they could swim and it was just wonderful. When we went to go into the beach community, they turned us away because we were a multicultural group. So we had to go home. It was terrible for her; for us. Certainly for the young women who were with us.

I think my family—my father in particular; my mother too—had good values. We lived in a very white neighborhood: Bay Ridge. At one point, I think, a family from China moved across the street and the neighbors went wild. Somebody said something to my father and he said, “Well, I’d rather have them than you—at least they’re not bigots.” I thought, Are you the same man I live with [laughing]? He really gave it to them and that ended that discussion.

From both I got—also because we were nine children, my father’s big thing, because my poor mother was so overwhelmed. He would say to her, “You have to see each of them separately; you can’t—.” As the oldest, I helped take care of them. I had a tendency to lump them: “Everybody up to bed.” “Everybody out of the bed.” He’d say, “Now, you have to see each one for who he or she is.” That was a great lesson to learn: no matter how big the group, you have to try to see each one for who they are. That was a nice lesson to learn.
VV: Does seeing the same buildings and furniture from the beginning of your time at Saint Joseph’s make you feel more at home or would you like to see a change?

LM: I haven’t really seen the same buildings, you remember? I was out in Patchogue and then Patchogue built a library. Then they built a gym. Then they built a piece on the back of the library that we call the Business Technology Center, because it’s got all of the computer rooms and everything in it. It didn’t stay the same out there. Nor did the furniture—the furniture was coming in all the time to fill the next classroom. Then, here, I think you’ve grown a lot. You have your gymnasium. Your library certainly has changed in its appearance and look. It was very old fashioned [laughter]. Now, it’s up to date and you have your computers, your special desks, and so on. I think you've changed with the times. I think your labs have been redone. Is that true?

LB: Nursing labs, yes, definitely.

LM: The Nursing labs have been redone. When Sister Elizabeth first came in and she looked at the bio labs—you may or may not believe this—they were so old fashioned that the first things she did was make them redo the Bio labs so that you would have the equipment you needed. She said, “Who would come to school and be a Science major here, you look like you’re back in the 19th century.” She was very aware that things had to be made more current and she did do that. She was very committed to doing that.

VV: Being part of Bishop Kearney, even for a year, which is my former high school and Saint Joseph’s College, I would like to know if you see any similarities that have stuck to you between the two organizations?

LM: Well, they both were run by the Sisters of Saint Joseph at the time. I think that the Sisters are maybe not there anymore, but—

VV: In Bishop Kearney?

LM: Yes, I don’t think they—

VV: They are.

LM: Oh, they are, okay. When I was in Bishop Kearney, it was a wonderful school. The girls were so smart, my God. Sister John Crucis was the Principal and she was very avant-garde. The principal before her was very strict. You walked on the left side of the hall—
VV: Yes, that’s still around [laughter].

LM: Yes, that keeps the hallway less crowded. No, when Sister John Crucis was there, the girls were sitting in the hall and doing all kinds of things. They were very smart and that was always a pleasure to teach. I taught English and I monitored the—. I guess it was the magazine at the time? One of the publications. That was fun.

VV: The Tablet?

LM: It wasn’t the Tablet, it was called something else. I was also the [inaudible] moderator? of the JV basketball team.

VV: Oh, nice.

LM: Not that I know anything about it [basketball], but anyway [laughter]. I cheered loudly. I went to the games. I was only there a year—I liked it a lot because I loved the students. The students were marvelous, the Sisters were very good too.

VV: What class did you teach?

LM: I taught freshman Comp[osition] and I taught an American Literature class or two. It’s hard to remember way back then, but it was very delightful to teach those girls.

VV: Did Dr. [Anne] Mulligan teach while you were there?

LM: Yes, she had just come on brand new.

VV: Oh, really?

LM: Brand new baby teacher—

VV: I was in her last AP English class.

LM: Yes, she’s very good.

VV: Yes.

LM: I learned from her—

VV: Now she’s just working here.
LM: Now she’s just working here [laughter] teaching other teachers how to teach. I hope they learn from her because she was a very good—

VV: Yes, she was.

LM: Very creative. I liked her a lot. I still like her a lot [laughter].

DK: As the college started using technology in the 1990s, what all changes did it bring to your method of teaching? How did technology influence you?

LM: The first thing I did, because I believed in it, was to get video conferencing going and video conferencing classes going; so that the Patchogue students who needed more exposure to the world and the Brooklyn students, would be in conversation. One of the first things that I did was to use the video conferencing for class. That was a wonderful experience. Then at one point, toward the end of the semester, the students in Patchogue came in by bus with me and another class, Tom [Thomas] Petriano’s class. We met the Brooklyn students in the city and we all went to a play and out to like a lunch. If you were feeling wealthy, you went to a certain place for lunch. If you were less wealthy, we had another place for you. You could go to Burger King or you could go to this nice little restaurant, whichever you chose. We had a very good time and it was nice. I liked the students to meet and they liked to meet each other.

Sometimes you’d think there was a rivalry between the schools—maybe there is, I don’t know—but that’s not how we looked at it. We looked at it as an opportunity to enrich people and get to know other people and the video conferencing helped that. It also helped meetings with faculty.

DK: Yes, so did the students of Patchogue interact with faculty in Brooklyn?

LM: Yes, yes. There were faculty there teaching out to us and we were teaching into Brooklyn. It wasn’t the best because we didn’t have the kind of thing they have now where the camera follows the teacher. We just had one camera. I guess you could call it primitive, but it worked. I had very smart students and they made it work. In Brooklyn, I had someone minding them sort of and in Patchogue I was there. Another teacher was there with me, just to be [since they were] interested in how to do it. We had a very nice class. Very smart, very nice, and they got along famously. Then they finally met in the city and that was like old home week, because they’d just seen each other on the screen and now see [each other] in the flesh.
DK: Were you able to use the magnetic tape machine?

LM: I don’t even know what that is [laughter]. What is it?

DK: Well, that’s like a newly launched technology at that point in time, so okay [laughter]. I don’t know that either, to be honest.

LM: Maybe I used it, who knows [laughter].

DK: Okay, in what ways did your education in English & Literature help you take SJC to the next level?

LM: Oh, I took it to the next level, how wonderful [laughter].

DK: Yes, you did definitely.

LM: I think everybody definitely loves their major. I had a Sister who’s a Child Study person say to me once, “This is the best major—the most important [inaudible] it’s dealing with children and human life—,” Blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, enough, please [laughter]. I mean—I think English is a very broadening major and it leads you to other cultures, other times, and other places. I felt—I just loved to read so why not be an English major. In college, I took a history minor because they sort of went together. I wasn’t very creative about my—. I just did what you had to do to get through, not in a bad way. I loved my courses. I worked hard and I got a very good education that [inaudible] me right through the doctorate.

VV: What impact has the study of African American literature made in your life?

LM: I think my life caused me to go into African American literature. I was doing this and that—wound up with it. It gave me language and it gave me—. I saw in the novels and books of Toni Morrison: the people I was working with. In the people I was working with I saw: Toni Morrison’s characters. It all sort of fit together for me. Of all the African American writers, I just liked her the best. I read the others and I taught the others. I didn’t realize when I started or way into what I was doing that she herself was Catholic. I said to myself, well that’s probably what I recognize in her use of, in quotes, “mythology” or the way she looks at the world sort of open ended. No closed—. Most of her books end kind of leaving you open: wondering what’s going to happen next. It’s always open and it's kind of part of the Catholic analogical imagination; where things are a little bit more fluid: both-end[ed] rather than either/or. [The endings are] not so clearly demarcated as perhaps it might be in a non-Catholic situation.
LB: You talked about how there was a lot of segregation in Nassau County—


LB: Yes—and differences, you saw. Do you think literature and English itself just brings all multicultural races/ethnicities together? Is that where you found your ground and kind of understood another perspective of how the other people are feeling and what they went through, possibly?

LM: Remember, I came from a large family; many personalities—

LB: Right.

LM: We were poor because we were a large family. I was always comfortable with difference. It’s almost like I was trained to—I grew up with a father who said, “Everybody’s different and they have to be treated differently.” Sometimes you didn’t like that; you thought, 

Wasn’t fair, but everybody can’t be the same. That he impressed upon us, “I’m doing this for you because you have this need and this for you because you have that.” He was very good at that. It made a big impression on me because, I thought, Oh, because, of course, I’m looking at, Why is she getting that and I’m not? That kind of upbringing; looking at difference and appreciating it, and understanding that what I need is not necessarily what you need. My gifts are not your gifts and vice versa, but it’s not a threat. Difference is not a threat. That had a profound influence on me.

That enabled me to go from inner-city work, out to Patchogue to do College work, over to Stony Brook to do graduate work, and back to inner-city work. It enabled me to walk through those worlds comfortably, because I had been trained to appreciate and not be threatened by difference. That’s how I was raised.

VV: In 1990, you presented a paper called 18th Century African American Literature at the New England 18th Century Society. Can you discuss a little bit about this paper and what your inspiration on this topic was?

LM: My inspiration was that my mentor at Stony Brook was an 18th century scholar. She was going to this conference and I was going with her; I was going to present a paper, Or else. I presented a paper on Pierre Toussaint—African American personage of the 18th century and talked about his writing and how he fit into the society of the 18th century. That’s what I did at that. I have very little recollection, but it went alright. At one point, somebody asked me a question and I just looked [since] I thought I had said it in the paper work. Some person got up and said, “She already answered you—it’s right here.” I said, “Oh,
thank you [laughter].” Then I find out that was a big famous scholar—I was thrilled [sounds of awe from the students]. I said, Ooh, good. I had done well and I got more confidence, which is why she made me go, I think. That I would have to go and face the crowd. It was scary. It was my first time and I was very nervous. Then you get past it and realize everybody’s in the same place.

LB: What did that paper discuss, may I ask?

LM: It discussed an 18th century slave who escaped to New York City and wrote—believe it or not the name is escaping me—and what he wrote sounded like he was approving of his state. Please let the name come to me—it’s not. He agreed with the way he was being treated and whatever. What I did was, rightly or wrongly, deconstruct that sermon that he gave and showed how the language he used was really saying just the opposite. If you read it without suspicion, it sounded like he was saying exactly what the white community wanted to hear. If you read it a little more suspiciously, which is what deconstruction is and does, you saw that he was using language, here, and there, and the other place, that undermines his own argument and lets you see this was not good. That’s what I did on the paper [students praise affirmatively]. I was so brilliant [laughter].

LB: I wouldn’t know—if you read something, that you would read it directly, but you figuring that out—that takes a lot.

LM: Well, in the future, don’t. Be suspicious.

LB: Right.

LM: When you read be suspicious, look at the language.

LB: Definitely. Analyze, yes, critically.

LM: There must be a better word than suspicious, it sounds not so nice. It’s a negative term, but that’s what deconstruction was. I was watching a T.V. program once and they had a Sister on from a [inaudible] community someplace, the numbers were dwindling, and they were in this big building. There was like eight of them. Bigger building than this and lots of grounds. The person said to her, “Do you think your community’s going to grow again? Do you think you’ll ever be able to—.” She’s going, “Oh, yes I do. We can’t help but think that it’s going to come back,” or whatever. Meanwhile, her head is going like [indicates motion] this [laughter]. We can deconstruct her whole talk there because something is happening.
LB: In 1950, 11 college teams, including Saint Joseph’s College, went to debate at John Hopkins University and the topic was, *Should the Non-Communist nations form a new international organization?* You know, *Still exist in that period of time.*

LM: 1950s?

LB: Yes, in the 1950s. Saint Joseph’s College was part of that team. Should SJC be collaborating more often with other respective institutions and have debates like this about the current political climate we’re living in now?

LM: Oh, sure. I don’t know how you would get that going. Maybe you could get that going.

Talk to student leaders at Saint Francis and Saint John and—. What else do we have around here? Even the public institutions, maybe.

LB: Right.

LM: Even if you go to the community colleges. I guess, Pratt, you could—. You would debate international problems or you would—. One thing about Saint Joseph’s that is good is that—I learned this fast because when I first went out to Patchogue, I was out there with a friend of mine who was also teaching English. We wanted to bring in this very esoteric speaker and pay [the speaker]. Students would go and we were going to use student government money to pay for this event. The Dean came down upon us and said, “No, you can’t use student government money for an event the faculty wants to run. Student government money—it belongs to the students.” That was annoying because the faculty had no money [*laughing*]. That point was made very clearly; burned in my soul, *You have money* and if you want to do something like that, *Go make a budget.* Get in touch with people, other schools and get a budget. Go to your student government and say, *We need this money for this very important thing.*

VV: Yes, I’m in student government; that’s an idea to bring upon.

LM: Yes. If you have something like that—you want to start debates on international problems or so-forth, with your local schools, that’s a wonderful thing.

LB: Yes, I think it’s very important especially [*since*] you live in such a diverse city and on top of that you’re kind of in this bubble; you don’t know what’s going on around the other states. It’s important to have dialogue and to discuss these issues. Especially if you live in a city like this and you’re in a classroom—you have certain ideas you want to talk about, but there's kind of that—. I guess a little thing from the teacher: You can say what you like, but at the same time you have to be kind of conscious of who you are talking about and what
you’re talking about. I think it’s important, in general, to go out there and to discuss it with the other institutions as well.

LM: Who are you’re talking about and what are you’re talking about? You’re talking about people in the schools? The schools’ policies or—?

LB: Yes, in general. In History classes—I’m taking New York City History right now.

LM: Right.

LB: There’s certain people who that might not agree with you—

LM: Your classmates?

LB: Yes, just having that conversation. It brings an open minded perspective for another. I think that’s important just in general, in the City. Especially what’s going on now and our leader, yes.

LM: I think that you have—as I said—you need to do a little research: find out what the other schools are doing. Is there a program like that somewhere else that you could model it on? Is there a debate program that you can model it on? We used to have here—way back when he was young and handsome—the former president of NYU, John Sexton taught in Kearney and then came here and worked. He was big on that kind of thing. He was the big debate coach. When he coached the team, they won everything. It's a good idea you could do some research on. Is anybody doing it? Do you need a debate coach or something? I don’t know.

LB: Yes, the student government—we all have these speakers coming in and we talk about things like this. We recently had a speaker from the Women’s Empowerment Club.

DK: Deborah.

LB: Yes, Deborah. Then we had Dr. Jones who discussed social justice. I think just having more of these programs is a great improvement.

LM: Yourselves maybe doing some research and debating or something.

LB: Yes, definitely. One last question we would like to ask before we end the interview is: What is your most cherished memory at Saint Joseph’s College?
LM: There’s so many, right? You’re talking about memory; it’s throwing me back rather than—

LB: Take your time.

DK or VV: Yes [whispers], it’s okay.

LM: When I think about Saint Joseph’s College—believe it or not—I think about the day before it opened in Patchogue. It was this big high school building and it had been used when the high school left BOCES [the Board of Cooperative Educational Services], which is a program for young people with special needs—whether they are physically, socially, emotionally, or mentally handicapped. BOCES is the program they have on Long Island—I don’t know what it stands for—for those children that need special education of some kind. Because some of those children were emotionally disturbed—the building had been roughed up a little bit, so it had to be fixed [nervously laughing]. The day before it opened, Sister Virginia Therese, the Vice President and Dean of the Patchogue campus, I, and two of the women who worked there who were [inaudible] part of the maintenance staff—which was very minimal now [then]—. The men were outside trying to get the fields and the parking lot ready for the next day. We were inside cleaning the bathrooms, checking the classrooms—that the desks were all lined up and not scattered all around the place, trying to make it look nice for when the students walked in. It involved a lot of cleaning, scrubbing, polishing, and this, and that, and the other thing.

That was always what the Sisters have always done from the time they first began when they came to the United States. When the Bishop or somebody would say, “We want you to open this school.” You go in the day before, maybe—set up the desks, polish the floors, get the boards cleaned and the next day the students come in. That’s kind of the history of almost any place where we went. You get in there, you do it, and the next day it starts. That day we did all of that cleaning, scrubbing, and whatever and the next day the students came for Orientation. I was all dressed up—I looked very nice the next day.

That kind of thing plugs into the history of the Congregation. Whenever we found some place or went in to do a new work or—. We really rolled up our sleeves, got in there, and did the work. Even to this day you’ll see that: you’ll see people walking out of things and you’ll see Sister Elizabeth cleaning up [laughing] or—. Sister Margaret, or—. You’ll see they don’t just float out like great ladies or whatever. They’re always making sure that it’s set up right or cleaned up correctly. That’s part of the charisma [inaudible] of the Sisters of Saint Joseph’s: you roll up your sleeves and you do what needs to be done. We have no specific mission like Nursing or this or that, we teach here because we were asked to come and teach here. In other parts of the country our health system is the lead Apostolate of the Sisters. Here, it was teaching; they wanted us to teach—so we did.
LB: Well, Sister Loretta, we would just like to thank you. It’s a pleasure to have this interview with you—

LM: Oh, well it was very nice meeting you too. It was nice.

LB: All of the contributions you have made to the College—

LM: Thank you.

LB: We greatly appreciate it.

LM: Thank you. I have enjoyed the College; it’s been a very wonderful, challenging career. It has. It has enriched me a great deal.

LB: Awesome [whispering].

LM: Once in a while a student will come back and say, “You know you were right when you said that [laughter].” I say, Hello? You think I just tell you things [laughter]?

LK: I knew what I was doing all along [laughter].

LM: Anyway, this was a pleasure too and I hope I answered your questions.

LB: Oh, yes, you definitely—

LK: You sure did.

LB: Even for me—I don’t remember the things I did last week—

LM: That’s right!

LB: —it’s hard, yes.

LM: Did you go turn it off?

LK: No we didn’t. Well, thank you.

LM: Did you get it?
LK: Yes, we got it, yes. I wanted to ask one question: have you met Toni Morrison—or seen her?

LM: Yes, I did.

MM: When you entered the Convent you talked about your family: how they were open and they were service-oriented people. Do you think that kind of influenced you to become a Sister and enter the Convent?

LM: Yes, yes. In the 60s, that was the day of, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country,” and the Peace Corps, this thing, and that thing. I looked at all those things: Enlist in the Peace Corps—. It was my college training. I went to Seton Hill [University] College in Pennsylvania and they were very service-oriented like Saint Joseph’s. I thought about it and what I thought was—if you went into any of those groups, you would go in for three years. Then you would say, Goodbye, good luck, and leave. I thought, Well, I don’t really want to do that. I’d rather do something that had a more permanent commitment. That’s really why I chose the Convent and the Sisters of Saint Joseph—because I had met them working in the poor sections of Brooklyn. I thought, That’s good. I did. I did work in the inner city for a long time.

MM: Wait, so you entered the Convent after college?

LM: After college.

MM: After college.

MM: Okay. Great. Thank you.

LM: Alright, there you go.
Informed Consent/Release Form

This oral history project is being conducted as a part of St. Joseph's College Brooklyn Campus Academic Honors Concentration. 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 St. Joseph’s College Brooklyn Campus, 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 12/1/17

Interviewee/Interviewer’s name (please print clearly)

Lubna Batool
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Drishiti Kalia
Interviewee/Interviewer’s signature

Date 12/01/2017

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

Date  

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Interviewee/Interviewer’s signature: Valentina Velez Valencia

Date: Dec. 1, 2017

Interviewee/Interviewer’s name (please print clearly): Valentina Velez Valencia